

By the Same Author

★

THE EMPEROR JONES
THE MOON OF THE CARIBBEES
THE HAIRY APE
ANNA CHRISTIE
BEYOND THE HORIZON
ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS
MARCO MILLIONS
STRANGE INTERLUDE
LAZARUS LAUGHED
MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
AH, WILDERNESS!

The Great God Brown

including *The Fountain, The
Dreamy Kid* and *Before
Breakfast*

by

Eugene O'Neill



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The Pier of the Casino. Four years later.

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PROLOGUE

SCENE. *A cross-section of the pier of the Casino. In the rear, built out beyond the edge, is a rectangular space with benches on the three sides. A rail encloses the entire wharf at the back.*

It is a moonlight night in mid-June. From the Casino comes the sound of the school quartet rendering "Sweet Adeline" with many ultra-sentimental quavers. There is a faint echo of the ensuing hand-clapping — then nothing but the lapping of ripples against the piles and their swishing on the beach — then footsteps on the boards and Billy Brown walks along from right with his mother and father. The mother is a dumpy woman of forty-five, overdressed in black lace and spangles. The father is fifty or more, the type of bustling, genial, successful, provincial business man, stout and hearty in his evening dress.

Billy Brown is a handsome, tall and athletic boy of nearly eighteen. He is blond and blue-eyed, with a likeable smile and a frank good-humoured face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence. He is in evening dress.

They walk arm in arm, the mother between.

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MOTHER (*always addressing the father*). This Commencement dance is badly managed. Such singing! Such poor voices! Why doesn't Billy sing?

BILLY (*to her*). Mine is a regular fog horn! (*He laughs.*)

MOTHER (*to the air*). I had a pretty voice, when I was a girl. (*Then, to the father, caustically.*) Did you see young Anthony strutting around the ball-room in dirty flannel trousers?

FATHER. He's just showing off.

MOTHER. Such impudence! He's as ignorant as his father.

FATHER. The old man's all right. My only kick against him is he's been too damned conservative to let me branch out.

MOTHER (*bitterly*). He has kept you down to his level — out of pure jealousy.

FATHER. But he took me into partnership, don't forget —

MOTHER (*sharply*). Because you were the brains! Because he was afraid of losing you! (*A pause.*)

BILLY (*admiringly*). Dion came in his old clothes for a bet with me. He's a real sport. He wouldn't have been afraid to appear in his pyjamas! (*He grins with appreciation.*)

MOTHER. Isn't the moonlight clear! (*She goes and sits on the centre bench. Billy stands at the left*

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corner, forward, his hand on the rail, like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge. His father stands in front of the bench on right. The mother announces, with finality.) After he's through college, Billy must study for a profession of some sort, I'm determined on that! (She turns to her husband, defiantly, as if expecting opposition.)

FATHER (*eagerly and placatingly*). Just what I've been thinking, my dear. Architecture! How's that? Billy a first-rate number-one architect! That's my proposition! What I've always wished I could have been myself. Only I never had the opportunity. But Billy — we'll make him a partner in the firm after. Anthony, Brown and Son, architects and builders — instead of contractors and builders!

MOTHER (*yearning for the realization of a dream*). And we won't lay sidewalks — or dig sewers — ever again?

FATHER (*a bit ruffled*). I and Anthony can build anything your pet can draw — even if it's a church. (Then, selling his idea.) It's a great chance for him! He'll design — expand us — make the firm famous.

MOTHER (*to the air — musingly*). When you proposed, I thought your future promised success — my future — (*with a sigh*) — Well, I suppose we've been comfortable. Now, it's his future. How would Billy like to be an architect? (She does not look at him.)

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BILLY (*to her*). All right, Mother. (*Then sheepishly.*) I guess I've never bothered much about what I'd like to do after college — but architecture sounds all right to me, I guess.

MOTHER (*to the air — proudly*). Billy used to draw houses when he was little.

FATHER (*jubilantly.*) Billy's got the stuff in him to win, if he'll only work hard enough.

BILLY (*dutifully*). I'll work hard, Dad.

MOTHER. Billy can do anything!

BILLY (*embarrassed*). I'll try, Mother. (*There is a pause.*)

MOTHER (*with a sudden shiver*). The nights are so much colder than they used to be! Think of it, I once went moonlight bathing in June when I was a girl — but the moonlight was so warm and beautiful in those days, do you remember, Father?

FATHER (*puts his arm around her affectionately*). You bet I do, Mother. (*He kisses her. The orchestra at the Casino strikes up a waltz.*) There's the music. Let's go back and watch the young folks dance. (*They start off, leaving Billy standing there.*)

MOTHER (*suddenly calls back over her shoulder*). I want to watch Billy dance.

BILLY (*dutifully*). Yes, Mother!

(*He follows them. For a moment the faint sound of the music and the lapping of waves is heard. Then footsteps again*

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and the three Anthonys come in. First come the father and mother, who are not masked. The father is a tall lean man of fifty-five or sixty, with a grim, defensive face, obstinate to the point of stupid weakness. The mother is a thin, frail, faded woman, her manner perpetually nervous and distraught, but with a sweet and gentle face that had once been beautiful. The father wears an ill-fitting black suit, like a mourner. The mother wears a cheap, plain, black dress. Following them, as if he were a stranger, walking alone, is their son, Dion. He is about the same height as young Brown, but lean and wiry, without repose, continually in restless nervous movement. His face is masked. The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face — dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life — into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gaily scoffing and sensual young Pan. He is dressed in a grey flannel shirt, open at the neck, rubber-soled shoes over bare feet, and soiled white flannel trousers. The father strides to the centre bench and sits down. The mother, who has been holding to his arm, lets go and stands by the

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bench at the right. They both stare at Dion, who, with a studied carelessness, takes his place at the rail, where young Brown had stood. They watch him, with queer, puzzled eyes.)

MOTHER (*suddenly — pleading*). You simply must send him to college.

FATHER. I won't. I don't believe in it. Colleges turn out lazy loafers to sponge on their poor old fathers! Let him slave like I had to! That'll teach him the value of a dollar! College'll only make him a bigger fool than he is already! I never got above grammar school but I've made money and established a sound business. Let him make a man out of himself like I made of myself!

DION (*mockingly — to the air*). This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father. (*They both stare at him.*)

FATHER (*with angry bewilderment*). What — what — what's that?

MOTHER (*gently remonstrating to her son*). Dion, dear! (*Then to her husband — tauntingly*). Brown takes all the credit! He tells every one the success is all due to his energy — that you're only an old stick-in-the-mud!

FATHER (*stung, harshly*). The damn fool! He knows better'n anyone if I hadn't held him down to common sense, with his crazy wild-cat notions, he'd have had us ruined long ago!

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MOTHER. He's sending Billy to college – Mrs. Brown just told me – going to have him study architecture afterwards, too, so's he can help expand your firm!

FATHER (*angrily*). What's that? (*Suddenly turns on Dion furiously.*) Then you can make up your mind to go too! And you'll learn to be a better architect than Brown's boy or I'll turn you out in the gutter without a penny! You hear?

DION (*mockingly – to the air*). It's difficult to choose – but architecture sounds less laborious.

MOTHER (*fondly*). You ought to make a wonderful architect, Dion. You've always painted pictures so well –

DION (*with a start – resentfully*). Why must she lie? Is it my fault? She knows I only try to paint. (*Passionately.*) But I will, some day! (*Then quickly, mocking again.*) On to college! Well, it won't be home, anyway, will it? (*He laughs queerly and approaches them. His father gets up defensively. Dion bows to him.*) I thank Mr. Anthony for this splendid opportunity to create myself – (*He kisses his mother, who bows with a strange humility as if she were a servant being saluted by the young master – then adds lightly*) – in my mother's image, so she may feel her life comfortably concluded.

(*He sits in his Father's place at centre and his mask stares with a frozen mockery before him. They stand on each side, looking dumbly at him.*)

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MOTHER (*at last, with a shiver*). It's cold. June didn't use to be cold. I remember the June when I was carrying you, Dion — three months before you were born. (*She stares up at the sky.*) The moonlight was warm, then. I could feel the night wrapped around me like a grey velvet gown lined with warm sky and trimmed with silver leaves!

FATHER (*gruffly — but with a certain awe*). My mother used to believe the full of the moon was the time to sow. She was terrible old-fashioned. (*With a grunt.*) I can feel it's bringing on my rheumatism. Let's go back indoors.

DION (*with intense bitterness*). Hide! Be ashamed! (*They both start and stare at him.*)

FATHER (*with bitter hopelessness. To his wife — indicating their son*). Who is he? You bore him!

MOTHER (*proudly*). He's my boy! He's Dion!

DION (*bitterly resentful*). What else, indeed! The identical son. (*Then, mockingly.*) Are Mr. Anthony and his wife going in to dance! The nights grow cold! The days are dimmer than they used to be! Let's play hide-and-seek! Seek the monkey in the moon!

(*He suddenly cuts a grotesque caper, like a harlequin, and darts off, laughing with forced abandon. They stare after him — then slowly follow. Again there is silence except for the sound of the lapping waves. Then Margaret comes in, fol-*

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lowed by the humbly worshipping Billy Brown. She is almost seventeen, pretty and vivacious, blonde, with big romantic eyes, her figure lithe and strong, her facial expression intelligent but youthfully dreamy, especially now in the moonlight. She is in a simple white dress. On her entrance, her face is masked with an exact, almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of a Girl instead of the individual Margaret.)

MARGARET (*looking upward at the moon and singing in low tone as they enter*). "Ah, moon of my delight that knowest no wane!"

BILLY (*eagerly*). I've got that record — John McCormack. It's a peach! Sing some more. (*She looks upward in silence. He keeps standing respectfully behind her, glancing embarrassedly toward her averted face. He tries to make conversation.*) I think the *Rubáiyát's* great stuff, don't you? I never could memorize poetry worth a darn. Dion can recite lots of Shelley's poems by heart.

MARGARET (*slowly takes off her mask — to the moon*). Dion! (*A pause.*)

BILLY (*fidgeting*). Margaret!

MARGARET (*to the moon*). Dion is so wonderful!

BILLY (*blunderingly*). I asked you to come out here because I wanted to tell you something.

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MARGARET (*to the moon*). Why did Dion look at me like that? It made me feel so crazy!

BILLY. I wanted to ask you something, too.

MARGARET. That one time he kissed me – I can't forget it! He was only joking – but I felt – and he saw and just laughed.

BILLY. Because that's the uncertain part. My end of it is a sure thing, and has been for a long time, and I guess everybody in town knows it – they're always kidding me – so it's a cinch you must know – how I feel about you.

MARGARET. Dion's so different from all the others. He can paint beautifully and write poetry and he plays and sings and dances so marvellously. But he's sad and shy, too, just like a baby sometimes, and he understands what I'm really like inside – and – and I'd love to run my fingers through his hair – and I love him! Yes, I love him! (*She stretches out her arms to the moon*). Oh, Dion, I love you!

BILLY. I love you, Margaret.

MARGARET. I wonder if Dion – I saw him looking at me again to-night – Oh, I wonder ...!

BILLY (*takes her hand and blurts out*). Can't you love me? Won't you marry me – after college –

MARGARET. Where is Dion, now, I wonder?

BILLY (*shaking her hand in an agony of uncertainty*). Margaret! Please answer me!

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MARGARET (*her dream broken, puts on her mask and turns to him – matter-of-factly*). It's getting chilly. Let's go back and dance, Billy.

BILLY (*desperately*). I love you! (*He tries clumsily to kiss her.*)

MARGARET (*with an amused laugh*). Like a brother! You can kiss me if you like. (*She kisses him.*) A big-brother kiss. It doesn't count. (*He steps back crushed, with head bowed. She turns away and takes off her mask – to the moon.*) I wish Dion would kiss me again!

BILLY (*painfully*). I'm a poor boob. I ought to know better. I'll bet I know. You're in love with Dion. I've seen you look at him. Isn't that it?

MARGARET. Dion! I love the sound of it!

BILLY (*huskily*). Well – he's always been my best friend – I'm glad it's him – and I guess I know how to lose – (*He takes her hand and shakes it*) – so here's wishing you all the success and happiness in the world, Margaret – and remember I'll always be your best friend! (*He gives her hand a final shake – swallows hard – then manfully.*) Let's go back in!

MARGARET (*to the moon – faintly annoyed*). What is Billy Brown doing here? I'll go down to the end of the dock and wait. Dion is the moon and I'm the sea. I want to feel the moon kissing the sea. I want Dion to leave the sky to me. I want the tides of my blood to leave my heart and follow

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him! (*She whispers like a little girl.*) Dion!
Margaret! Peggy! Peggy is Dion's girl – Peggy
is Dion's little girl – (*She sings laughingly, elfishly.*)
Dion is my Daddy-O! (*She is walking toward the
end of the dock, off left.*)

BILLY (*who has turned away*). I'm going. I'll
tell Dion you're here.

MARGARET (*more and more strongly and assertively,
until at the end she is a wife and a mother*). And I'll
be Mrs. Dion – Dion's wife – and he'll be my
Dion – my own Dion – my little boy – my baby!
The moon is drowned in the tides of my heart, and
peace sinks deep through the sea!

(*She disappears off left, her upturned un-
masked face like that of a rapturous
visionary. There is silence again, in
which the dance music is heard. Then
this stops and Dion comes in. He walks
quickly to the bench at centre, and throws
himself on it, hiding his masked face in
his hands. After a moment, he lifts his
head, peers about, listens huntedly,
then slowly takes off his mask. His real
face is revealed in the bright moonlight,
shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep
sadness.*)

DION (*with a suffering bewilderment*). Why am I
afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and
grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to
live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the

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living colours of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? (*Clasping his hands above in supplication.*) Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armour in order to touch or to be touched?

(*A second's pause of waiting silence – then he suddenly claps his mask over his face again, with a gesture of despair, and his voice becomes bitter and sardonic.*) Or rather, Old Graybeard, why the devil was I ever born at all?

(*Steps are heard from the right. Dion stiffens and his mask stares straight ahead. Billy comes in from the right. He is shuffling along disconsolately. When he sees Dion, he stops abruptly and glowers resentfully – but at once the “good loser” in him conquers this.*)

BILLY (*embarrassedly*). Hello, Dion. I've been looking all over for you. (*He sits down on the bench at right, forcing a joking tone.*) What are you sitting here for, you nut – trying to get more moon-struck? (*A pause – awkwardly.*) I just left Margaret –

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DION (*gives a start—immediately defensively mocking*). Bless you, my children!

BILLY (*gruffly and slangily*). I'm out of it—she gave me the gate. You're the original white-haired boy. Go on in and win! We've been chums ever since we were kids, haven't we?—and—I'm glad it's you, Dion. (*This huskily—he fumbles for Dion's hand and gives it a shake.*)

DION (*letting his hand fall back—bitterly*). Chums? Oh no, Billy Brown would despise me!

BILLY. She's waiting for you now, down at the end of the dock.

DION. For me? Which? Who? Oh no, girls only allow themselves to look at what is seen!

BILLY. She's in love with you.

DION (*moved—a pause—stammers*). Miracle? I'm afraid! (*He chants flippantly.*) I love, thou lovest, he loves, she loves! She loves, she loves—what?

BILLY. And I know damn well, underneath your nuttiness, you're gone on her.

DION (*moved*). Underneath? I love love! I'd love to be loved! But I'm afraid! (*Then aggressively.*) Was afraid! Not now! Now I can make love—to anyone! Yes, I love Peggy! Why not? Who is she? Who am I? We love, you love, they love, one loves! No one loves! All the world loves a lover, God loves us all and we love Him! Love is a word—a shameless ragged

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ghost of a word – begging at all doors for life at any price!

BILLY (*always as if he hadn't listened to what the other said*). Say, let's you and me room together at college –

DION. Billy wants to remain by her side!

BILLY. It's a bet, then! (*Forcing a grin.*) You can tell her I'll see that you behave! (*Turns away.*) So long. Remember she's waiting. (*He goes.*)

DION (*dazedly, to himself*). Waiting – waiting for me! (*He slowly removes his mask. His face is torn and transfigured by joy. He stares at the sky rapidly.*) O God in the moon, did you hear? She loves me! I am not afraid! I am strong! I can love! She protects me! Her arms are softly around me! She is warmly around me! She is my skin! She is my armour! Now I am born – I – the I! – one and indivisible – I who love Margaret! (*He glances at his mask triumphantly – in tones of deliverance.*) You are outgrown! I am beyond you! (*He stretches out his arms to the sky.*) O God, now I believe! (*From the end of the wharf, her voice is heard.*)

MARGARET. Dion!

DION (*raptly*). Margaret!

MARGARET (*nearer*). Dion!

DION. Margaret!

MARGARET. Dion! (*She comes running in, her*

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mask in her hands. He springs toward her with outstretched arms, but she shrinks away with a frightened shriek and hastily puts on her mask. Dion starts back. She speaks coldly and angrily.) Who are you? Why are you calling me? I don't know you!

DION (*heart-brokenly*). I love you!

MARGARET (*freezingly*). Is this a joke – or are you drunk?

DION (*with a final pleading whisper*). Margaret! (*But she only glares at him contemptuously. Then with a sudden gesture he claps his mask on and laughs wildly and bitterly.*) Ha-ha-ha! That's one on you, Peg!

MARGARET (*with delight, pulling off her mask*). Dion! How did you ever – Why, I never knew you!

DION (*puts his arm around her boldly*). How? It's the moon – the crazy moon – the monkey in the moon – playing jokes on us! (*He kisses her with his masked face with a romantic actor's passion again and again.*) You love me! You know you do! Say it! Tell me! I want to hear! I want to feel! I want to know! I want to want! To want you as you want me!

MARGARET (*in ecstasy*). Oh, Dion, I do! I do love you!

DION (*with ironic mastery – rhetorically*). And I love you! Oh, madly! Oh, for ever and ever, amen! You are my evening star and all my

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Pleiades! Your eyes are blue pools in which gold dreams glide, your body is a young white birch leaning backward beneath the lips of spring. So! *(He has bent her back, his arms supporting her, his face above hers.)* So! *(He kisses her.)*

MARGARET *(with overpowering passionate languor)*. Oh, Dion! Dion! I love you!

DION *(with more and more mastery in his tone)*. I love, you love, we love! Come! Rest! Relax! Let go your clutch on the world! Dim and dimmer! Fading out in the past behind! Gone! Death! Now! Be born! Awake! Live! Dissolve into dew – into silence – into night – into earth – into space – into peace – into meaning – into joy – into God – into the Great God Pan! *(While he has been speaking, the moon has passed gradually behind a black cloud, its light fading out. There is a moment of intense blackness and silence. Then the light gradually comes on again. Dion's voice, at first in a whisper, then increasing in volume with the light, is heard.)* Wake up! Time to get up! Time to exist! Time for school! Time to learn! Learn to pretend! Cover your nakedness! Learn to lie! Learn to keep step! Join the procession! Great Pan is dead! Be ashamed!

MARGARET *(with a sob)*. Oh, Dion, I am ashamed!

DION *(mockingly)*. Sssshh! Watch the monkey in the moon! See him dance! His tail is a piece of string that was left when he broke loose from

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Jehovah and ran away to join Charley Darwin's circus!

MARGARET. I know you must hate me now!
(She throws her arms around him and hides her head on his shoulder.)

DION *(deeply moved)*. Don't cry! Don't — !
(He suddenly tears off his mask — in a passionate agony.) Hate you? I love you with all my soul! Love me! Why can't you love me, Margaret?

(He tries to kiss her but she jumps to her feet with a frightened cry, holding up her mask before her face protectingly.)

MARGARET. Don't! Please! I don't know you. You frighten me!

DION *(puts on his mask again — quietly and bitterly)*. All's well. I'll never let you see again. *(He puts his arm around her — gently mocking.)* By proxy, I love you. There! Don't cry! Don't be afraid! Dion Anthony will marry you some day. *(He kisses her.)* "I take this woman —" *(Tenderly joking.)* Hello, woman! Do you feel older by æons? Mrs. Dion Anthony, shall we go in and may I have the next dance?

MARGARET *(tenderly)*. You crazy child. *(Then, laughing with joy.)* Mrs. Dion Anthony! It sounds wonderful, doesn't it?

(They go out as

The Curtain Falls)

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SCENE. *Seven years later.*

The sitting-room of Mrs. Dion Anthony's half of a two-family house in the residential quarter of the town — one of those one-design districts that daze the eye with multiplied ugliness. The four pieces of furniture shown are in keeping — an arm-chair at left, a table with a chair behind it at centre, a sofa at right. The same court-room effect of the arrangement of benches in Act One is held to here. The background is a backdrop on which the rear wall is painted with the intolerable lifeless realistic detail of the stereotyped paintings which usually adorn the sitting-rooms of such houses. It is late afternoon of a grey day in winter.

Dion is sitting behind the table, staring before him. The mask hangs on his breast below his neck, giving the effect of two faces. His real face has aged greatly, grown more strained and tortured, but at the same time, in some queer way, more selfless and ascetic, more fixed in its resolute withdrawal from life. The mask, too, has changed. It is older, more defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean. It has already begun to show the ravages of dissipation.

DION (*suddenly reaches out and takes up a copy of*

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the New Testament which is on the table and, putting a finger in at random, opens and reads aloud the text at which it points). "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (*He stares before him in a sort of trance, his face lighted up from within but painfully confused — in an uncertain whisper.*) I will come — but where are you, Saviour? (*The noise of the outer door shutting is heard. Dion starts and claps the mocking mask on his face again. He tosses the Testament aside contemptuously.*) Blah! Fixation on old Mamma Christianity! You infant blubbering in the dark, you!

(He laughs, with a bitter self-contempt. Footsteps approach. He picks up a newspaper and hides behind it hurriedly. Margaret enters. She is dressed in stylish, expensive clothes and a fur coat, which look as if they had been remodelled and seen service. She has grown mature and maternal, in spite of her youth. Her pretty face is still fresh and healthy but there is the beginning of a permanently worried, apprehensive expression about the nose and mouth — an uncomprehending hurt in her eyes. Dion pretends to be engrossed in his paper. She bends down and kisses him.)

MARGARET (*with a forced gaiety*). Good morning — at four in the afternoon! You were snoring when I left!

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DION (*puts his arms around her with a negligent, accustomed gesture — mockingly*). The Ideal Husband!

MARGARET (*already preoccupied with another thought — comes and sits in chair on left*). I was afraid the children would disturb you, so I took them over to Mrs. Young's to play. (*A pause. He picks up the paper again. She asks anxiously.*) I suppose they'll be all right over there, don't you? (*He doesn't answer. She is more hurt than offended.*) I wish you'd try to take more interest in the children, Dion.

DION (*mockingly*). Become a father — before breakfast? I'm in too delicate a condition. (*She turns away, hurt. Penitently he pats her hand — vaguely.*) All right. I'll try.

MARGARET (*squeezing his hand — with possessive tenderness*). Play with them. You're a bigger kid than they are — underneath.

DION (*self-mockingly — flipping the Bible*). Underneath — I'm becoming downright infantile! "Suffer these little ones!"

MARGARET (*keeping to her certainty*). You're my oldest.

DION (*with mocking appreciation*). She puts the Kingdom of Heaven in its place!

MARGARET (*withdrawing her hand*). I was serious.

DION. So was I — about something or other.

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(*He laughs.*) This domestic diplomacy! We communicate in code – when neither has the other's key!

MARGARET (*frowns confusedly – then forcing a playful tone*). I want to have a serious talk with you, young man! In spite of your promises, you've kept up the hard drinking and gambling you started the last year abroad.

DION. From the time I realized it wasn't in me to be an artist – except in living – and not even in that! (*He laughs bitterly.*)

MARGARET (*with conviction*). But you *can* paint, Dion – beautifully!

DION (*with deep pain*). No! (*He suddenly takes her hand and kisses it gratefully.*) I love Margaret! Her blindness surpasseth all understanding! (*Then bitterly*) – or is it pity?

MARGARET. We've only got about one hundred dollars left in the bank.

DION (*with dazed surprise*). What? Is all the money from the sale of the house gone?

MARGARET (*wearily*). Every day or so you've been cashing cheques. You've been drinking – you haven't counted –

DION (*irritably*). I know! (*A pause – soberly.*) No more estate to fall back on, eh? Well, for five years it kept us living abroad in peace. It bought us a little happiness – of a kind – didn't it? – living and loving and having children – (*A slight pause –*

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bitterly) – thinking one was creating before one discovered one couldn't!

MARGARET (*this time with forced conviction*). But you *can* paint – beautifully!

DION (*angrily*). Shut up! (*A pause – then jeeringly.*) So my wife thinks it behoves me to settle down and support my family in the meagre style to which they'll have to become accustomed?

MARGARET (*shamefacedly*). I didn't say – still – something's got to be done.

DION (*harshly*). Will Mrs. Anthony helpfully suggest what?

MARGARET. I met Billy Brown on the street. He said you'd have made a good architect, if you'd stuck to it.

DION. Flatterer! Instead of leaving college when my Old Man died? Instead of marrying Peggy and going abroad and being happy?

MARGARET (*as if she hadn't heard*). He spoke of how well you used to draw.

DION. Billy was in love with Margaret at one time.

MARGARET. He wanted to know why you've never been in to see him.

DION. He's bound heaven-bent for success. It's the will of Mammon! Anthony and Brown, contractors and builders – death subtracts Anthony and I sell out – Billy graduates – Brown

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and Son, architects and builders – old man Brown perishes of paternal pride – and now we have William A. Brown, architect! Why his career itself already has an architectural design! One of God's mud pies!

MARGARET. He particularly told me to ask you to drop in.

DION (*springs to his feet – assertively*). No! Pride! I have been alive!

MARGARET. Why don't you have a talk with him?

DION. Pride in my failure.

MARGARET. You were always such close friends.

DION (*more and more desperately*). The pride which came after man's fall – by which he laughs as a creator at his self-defeats!

MARGARET. Not for my sake – but for your own – and, above all, for the children's!

DION (*with terrible despair*). Pride! Pride without which the Gods are worms!

MARGARET (*after a pause, meekly and humbly*). You don't want to? It would hurt you? All right, dear. Never mind. We'll manage somehow – you mustn't worry – you must start your beautiful painting again – and I can get that position in the library – it would be such fun for me working there! . . . (*She reaches out and takes his hand – tenderly.*) I love you, dear. I understand.

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DION (*slumps down into his chair, crushed, his face averted from hers, as hers is from him, although their hands are still clasped — in a trembling, expiring voice*). Pride is dying! (*As if he were suffocating, he pulls the mask from his resigned, pale, suffering face. He prays like a Saint in the desert, exorcizing a demon.*) Pride is dead! Blessed are the meek! Blessed are the poor in spirit!

MARGARET (*without looking at him — in a comforting motherly tone*). My poor boy!

DION (*resentfully — clapping on his mask again and springing to his feet — derisively*). Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit graves! Blessed are the poor in spirit for they are blind! (*Then with tortured bitterness.*) All right! Then I ask my wife to go and ask Billy Brown — that's more deadly than if I went myself! (*With wild mockery.*) Ask him if he can't find an opening for a talented young man who is only honest when he isn't sober — implore him, beg him in the name of old love, old friendship — to be a generous hero and save the woman and her children! (*He laughs with a sort of diabolical, ironical glee now, and starts to go out.*)

MARGARET (*meekly*). Are you going up street, Dion?

DION. Yes.

MARGARET. Will you stop at the butcher's and ask them to send two pounds of pork chops?

DION. Yes.

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MARGARET. And stop at Mrs. Young's and tell the children to hurry right home?

DION. Yes.

MARGARET. Will you be back for dinner, Dion?

DION. No. *(He goes, the outer door slams. Margaret sighs with a tired incomprehension and goes to the window and stares out.)*

MARGARET *(worriedly)*. I hope they'll be careful, crossing the street.

(Curtain)

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

SCENE. *Billy Brown's Office, at five in the afternoon. At centre, a fine mahogany desk with a swivel chair behind it. To the left of desk, an office arm-chair. To the right of desk, an office lounge. The background is a backdrop of an office wall, treated similarly to that of Scene One in its over-meticulous representation of detail.*

Billy Brown is seated at the desk looking over a blue print by the light of a desk lamp. He has grown into a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man, boyish still and with the same engaging personality.

The telephone rings.

BROWN (*answering it*). Yes? Who? (*This in surprise — then with eager pleasure.*) Ask her to come right in.

(He gets up and goes to the door, expectant and curious. Margaret enters. Her face is concealed behind the mask of the pretty young matron, still hardly a woman, who cultivates a naively innocent and bravely hopeful attitude toward things and acknowledges no wound to the world. She is dressed as in Scene One but with an added touch of effective primping here and there.)

MARGARET (*very gaily*). Hello, Billy Brown!

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BROWN (*awkward in her presence, shakes her hand*). Come in. Sit down. This is a pleasant surprise, Margaret.

(*She sits down on the lounge. He sits in his chair behind the desk, as before.*)

MARGARET (*looking around*). What lovely offices! My, but Billy Brown is getting grand!

BROWN (*pleased*). I've just moved in. The old place was too stuffy.

MARGARET. It looks so prosperous – but then, Billy is doing so wonderfully well, every one says.

BROWN (*modestly*). Well, to be frank, it's been mostly luck. Things have come my way without my doing much about it. (*Then, with an abashed pride.*) Still – I have done a little something myself. (*He picks the plan from the desk.*) See this? It's my design for the New Municipal Building. It's just been accepted – provisionally – by the Committee.

MARGARET (*taking it – vaguely*). Oh? (*She looks at it abstractedly. There is a pause. Suddenly.*) You mentioned the other day how well Dion used to draw –

BROWN (*a bit stiffly*). Yes, he certainly did. (*He takes the drawing from her and at once becomes interested and squints at it frowningly.*) Did you notice that anything seemed lacking in this?

MARGARET (*indifferently*). Not at all.

BROWN (*with a cheerful grin*). The Committee

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want it made a little more American. It's too much of a conventional Greco-Roman tomb, they say. (*Laughs.*) They want an original touch of modern novelty stuck in to liven it up and make it look different from other town halls. (*Putting the drawing back on his desk.*) And I've been figuring out how to give it to them, but my mind doesn't seem to run that way. Have you any suggestion?

MARGARET (*as if she hadn't heard*). Dion certainly draws well, Billy Brown was saying?

BROWN (*trying not to show his annoyance*). Why, yes — he did — and still can, I expect. (*A pause. He masters what he feels to be an unworthy pique and turns to her generously.*) Dion would have made a cracking good architect.

MARGARET (*proudly*). I know. He could be anything he wanted to.

BROWN (*a pause — embarrassedly*). Is he working at anything these days?

MARGARET (*defensively*). Oh, yes! He's painting wonderfully! But he's just like a child, he's so impractical. He doesn't try to have an exhibition anywhere, or anything.

BROWN (*surprised*). The one time I ran into him, I thought he told me he'd destroyed all his pictures — that he'd got sick of painting and completely given it up.

MARGARET (*quickly*). He always tells people that. He doesn't want anyone even to look at his

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things, imagine! He keeps saying they're rotten – when they're really too beautiful! He's too modest for his own good, don't you think? But it is true he hasn't done so much lately since we've been back. You see the children take up such a lot of his time. He just worships them! I'm afraid he's becoming a hopeless family man, just the opposite of what anyone would expect who knew him in the old days.

BROWN (*painfully embarrassed by her loyalty and his knowledge of the facts*). Yes, I know. (*He coughs self-consciously.*)

MARGARET (*aroused by something in his manner*). But I suppose the gossips are telling the same silly stories about him they always did. (*She forces a laugh.*) Poor Dion! Give a dog a bad name! (*Her voice breaks a little in spite of herself.*)

BROWN (*hastily*). I haven't heard any stories – (*he stops uncertainly, then decides to plunge in*) – except about money matters.

MARGARET (*forcing a laugh*). Oh, perhaps they're true enough. Dion is such a generous fool with his money, like all artists.

BROWN (*with a certain doggedness*). There's a rumour that you've applied for a position at the Library.

MARGARET (*forcing a gay tone*). Yes, indeed! Won't it be fun! Maybe it'll improve my mind! And one of us has got to be practical, so why not me? (*She forces a gay, girlish laugh.*)

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BROWN (*impulsively reaches out and takes her hand – awkwardly*). Listen, Margaret. Let's be perfectly frank, will you? I'm such an old friend, and I want like the deuce to. . . . You know darn well I'd do anything in the world to help you – or Dion.

MARGARET (*withdrawing her hand, coldly*). I'm afraid I – don't understand, Billy Brown.

BROWN (*acutely embarrassed*). Well, I – I just meant – you know, if you needed – (*A pause. He looks questioningly at her averted face – then ventures on another tack, matter-of-factly.*) I've got a proposition to make to Dion – if I could ever get hold of him. It's this way: business has been piling up on me – a run of luck – but I'm short-handed. I need a crack chief draughtsman darn badly – or I'm liable to lose out. Do you think Dion would consider it – as a temporary stop-gap – until he felt in the painting mood again?

MARGARET (*striving to conceal her eagerness and relief – judicially*). Yes – I really do. He's such a good sport and Billy and he were such pals once. I know he'd be only too tickled to help him out.

BROWN (*diffidently*). I thought he might be sensitive about working for – I mean, with me – when, if he hadn't sold out to Dad he'd be my partner now – (*earnestly*) – and, by jingo, I wish he was! (*Then, abruptly.*) Let's try to nail him down right away, Margaret. Is he home now? (*He reaches for the 'phone.*)

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MARGARET (*hurriedly*). No, he – he went out for a long walk.

BROWN. Perhaps I can locate him later around town somewhere.

MARGARET (*with a note of pleading*). Please don't trouble. It isn't necessary. I'm sure when I talk to him – he's coming home to dinner – (*Getting up.*) Then it's all settled, isn't it? Dion will be so glad to be able to help an old friend – he's so terribly loyal, and he's always liked Billy Brown so much! (*Holding out her hand.*) I really must go now!

BROWN (*shakes her hand*). Good-bye, Margaret. I hope you'll be dropping in on us a lot when Dion gets here.

MARGARET. Yes. (*She goes.*)

BROWN (*sits at his desk again, looking ahead in a not unsatisfying melancholy reverie. He mutters admiringly but pityingly*). Poor Margaret! She's a game sport, but it's pretty damn tough on her! (*Indignantly.*) By God, I'm going to give Dion a good talking-to one of these days!

(*Curtain*)

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

SCENE. *Cybel's parlour. An automatic, penny-in-the-slot player-piano is at centre, rear. On its right is a dirty gilt second-hand sofa. At the left is a bald-spotted crimson plush chair. The backdrop for the rear wall is cheap wall-paper of a dull yellow-brown, resembling a blurred impression of a fallow field in early spring. There is a cheap alarm clock on top of the piano. Beside it her mask is lying.*

Dion is sprawled on his back, fast asleep on the sofa. His mask has fallen down on his chest. His pale face is singularly pure, spiritual and sad.

The player-piano is groggily banging out a sentimental medley of "Mother - Mammy" tunes.

Cybel is seated on the stool in front of the piano. She is a strong, calm, sensual, blonde girl of twenty or so, her complexion fresh and healthy, her figure full-breasted and wide-hipped, her movements slow and solidly languorous like an animal's, her large eyes dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts. She chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end. Her eyes are fixed, incuriously, on Dion's pale face.

CYBEL (*as the tune runs out, glances at the clock,*

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which indicates midnight, then goes slowly over to Dion and puts her hand gently on his forehead). Wake up!

DION (*stirs, sighs and murmurs dreamily*). "And He laid his hands on them and healed them." (*Then with a start he opens his eyes and, half sitting up, stares at her bewilderedly.*) What — where — who are you? (*He reaches for his mask and claps it on defensively.*)

CYBEL (*placidly*). Only another female. You was camping on my steps, sound asleep. I didn't want to run any risk getting into more trouble with the cops pinching you there and blaming me, so I took you in to sleep it off.

DION (*mockingly*). Blessed are the pitiful, Sister! I'm broke — but you will be rewarded in Heaven!

CYBEL (*calmly*). I wasn't wasting my pity. Why should I? You were happy, weren't you?

DION (*approvingly*). Excellent! You're not a moralist, I see.

CYBEL (*going on*). And you look like a good boy, too — when you're asleep. Say, you better beat it home to bed or you'll be locked out.

DION (*mockingly*). Now you're becoming maternal, Miss Earth. Is that the only answer — to pin my soul into every vacant diaper? (*She stares down at his mask, her face growing hard. He laughs.*) But please don't stop stroking my aching brow. Your

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hand is a cool mud poultice on the sting of thought!

CYBEL (*calmly*). Stop acting. I hate ham fats. (*She looks at him as if waiting for him to remove his mask — then turns her back indifferently and goes to the piano.*) Well, if you simply got to be a regular devil like all the other visiting sports, I s'pose I got to play with you. (*She takes her mask and puts it on — then turns. The mask is the rouged and eye-blackened countenance of the hardened prostitute. In a coarse, harsh voice.*) Kindly state your dishonourable intentions, if any! I can't sit up all night keeping company! Let's have some music! (*She puts a plug in the machine. The same sentimental medley begins to play. The two masks stare at each other. She laughs.*) Shoot! I'm all set! It's your play, Kid Lucifer!

DION (*slowly removes his mask. She stops the music with a jerk. His face is gentle and sad — humbly*). I'm sorry. It has always been such agony for me to be touched!

CYBEL (*taking off her mask — sympathetically as she comes back and sits down on her stool*). Poor kid! I've never had one, but I can guess. They hug and kiss you and take you on their laps and pinch you and want to see you getting dressed and undressed — as if they owned you — I bet you I'd never let them treat one of mine that way!

DION (*turning to her*). You're lost in blind alleys,

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too. (*Suddenly holding out his hand to her.*) But you're strong. Let's be friends.

CYBEL (*with a strange sternness, searches his face.*) And never nothing more?

DION (*with a strange smile.*) Let's say, never anything less!

(*She takes his hand. There is a ring at the outside door bell. They stare at each other. There is another ring.*)

CYBEL (*puts on her mask, Dion does likewise. Mockingly.*) When you got to love to live it's hard to love living. I better join the A.F. of L. and soap-box for the eight-hour night! Got a nickel, baby? Play a tune. (*She goes out. Dion puts a nickel in. The same sentimental tune starts. Cybel returns, followed by Billy Brown. His face is rigidly composed, but his superior disgust for Dion can be seen. Dion jerks off the music and he and Billy look at each other for a moment, Cybel watching them both — then, bored, she yawns.*) He's hunting for you. Put out the lights when you go. I'm going to sleep. (*She starts to go — then, as if reminded of something — to Dion.*) Life's all right, if you let it alone. (*Then mechanically flashing a trade smile at Billy.*) Now you know the way, Handsome, call again! (*She goes.*)

BROWN (*after an awkward pause.*) Hello, Dion! I've been looking all over town for you. This place was the very last chance. . . . (*Another pause — embarrassedly.*) Let's take a walk.

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DION (*mockingly*). I've given up exercise. They claim it lengthens your life.

BROWN (*persuasively*). Come on, Dion, be a good fellow. You're certainly not staying here –

DION. Billy would like to think me taken in *flagrante delicto*, eh?

BROWN. Don't be a damn fool! Listen to me! I've been looking you up for purely selfish reasons. I need your help.

DION (*astonished*). What?

BROWN. I've a proposition to make that I hope you'll consider favourably out of old friendship. To be frank, Dion, I need you to lend me a hand down at the office.

DION (*with a harsh laugh*). So it's the job, is it? Then my poor wife did a-begging go!

BROWN (*repelled – sharply*). On the contrary, I had to beg her to beg you to take it! (*More angrily.*) Look here, Dion! I won't listen to you talk that way about Margaret! And you wouldn't if you weren't drunk! (*Suddenly shaking him.*) What in hell has come over you, anyway! You didn't use to be like this! What the devil are you going to do with yourself – sink into the gutter and drag Margaret with you? If you'd heard her defend you, lie about you, tell me how hard you were working, what beautiful things you were painting, how you stayed at home and idolized the children! – when every one knows you've been

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out every night sousing and gambling away the last of your estate. . . . (*He stops, ashamed, controlling himself.*)

DION (*wearily*). She was lying about her husband, not me, you fool! But it's no use explaining. (*Then, in a sudden, excitable passion.*) What do you want? I agree to anything — except the humiliation of yelling secrets at the deaf!

BROWN (*trying a bullying tone — roughly*). Bunk! Don't try to crawl out! There's no excuse and you know it. (*Then as Dion doesn't reply — penitently.*) But I know I shouldn't talk this way, old man! It's only because we're such old pals — and I hate to see you wasting yourself — you who had more brains than any of us! But, damn it, I suppose you're too much of a rotten cynic to believe I mean what I've just said!

DION (*touched*). I know Billy was always Dion Anthony's friend.

BROWN. You're damn right, I am — and I'd have proved it long ago if you'd only given me half a chance! After all, I couldn't keep chasing after you and be snubbed every time. A man has some pride!

DION (*bitterly mocking*). Dead wrong! Never more! None whatever! It's unmoral! Blessed are the poor in spirit, Brother! When shall I report?

BROWN (*eagerly*). Then you'll take the — you'll help me?

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DION (*wearily bitter*). I'll take the job. One must do something to pass away the time, while one is waiting – for one's next incarnation.

BROWN (*jokingly*). I'd say it was a bit early to be worrying about that. (*Trying to get Dion started.*) Come along, now. It's pretty late.

DION (*shakes his hand off his shoulder and walks away from him – after a pause*). Is my father's chair still there?

BROWN (*turns away – embarrassed*). I – I don't really remember, Dion – I'll look it up.

DION (*taking off his mask – slowly*). I'd like to sit where he spun what I have spent. What aliens we were to each other! When he lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met that man before. Only at the second of my conception. After that, we grew hostile with concealed shame. And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last

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time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity; so I shrank away, back into life, with naked nerves jumping like fleas, and in due course of nature another girl called me her boy in the moon and married me and became three mothers in one person, while I got paint on my paws in an endeavour to see God! (*He laughs wildly – claps on his mask.*) But that Ancient Humorist had given me weak eyes, so now I'll have to foreswear my quest for Him and go in for the Omnipresent Successful Serious One, the Great God Mr. Brown, instead! (*He makes him a sweeping, mocking bow.*)

BROWN (*repelled but cajolingly*). Shut up, you nut! You're still drunk. Come on! Let's start! (*He grabs Dion by the arm and switches off the light.*)

DION (*from the darkness – mockingly*). I am thy shorn, bald, nude sheep! Lead on, Almighty Brown, thou Kindly Light!

(*Curtain*)

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

SCENE. *Cybel's parlour — about sunset in spring seven years later. The arrangement of furniture is the same but the chair and sofa are new, bright-coloured, costly pieces. The old automatic piano at centre looks exactly the same. The cheap alarm clock is still on top of it. On either side of the clock, the masks of Dion and Cybel are lying. The background backdrop is brilliant, stunning wall-paper, on which crimson and purple flowers and fruits tumble over one another in a riotously profane lack of any apparent design.*

Dion sits in the chair on left, Cybel on the sofa. A card-table is between them. Both are playing solitaire. Dion is now prematurely grey. His face is that of an ascetic, a martyr, furrowed by pain and self-torture, yet lighted from within by a spiritual calm and human kindness.

Cybel has grown stouter and more voluptuous, but her face is still unmarked and fresh, her calm more profound. She is like an unmoved idol of Mother Earth.

The piano is whining out its same old sentimental medley. They play their cards intently and contentedly. The music stops.

CYBEL (*musingly*). I love those rotten old sob tunes. They make me wise to people. That's

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what's inside them – what makes them love and murder their neighbour – crying jags set to music!

DION (*compassionately*). Every song is a hymn. They keep trying to find the Word in the Beginning.

CYBEL. They try to know too much. It makes them weak. I never puzzled over them myself. I gave them a Tart. They understood her and knew their parts and acted naturally. And on both sides we were able to keep our real virtue, if you get me. (*She plays her last card – indifferently.*) I've made it again.

DION (*smiling*). Your luck is uncanny. It never comes out for me.

CYBEL. You keep getting closer, but it knows you still want to win – a little bit – and it's wise all I care about is playing. (*She lays out another game.*) Speaking of my canned music, our Mr. Brown hates that old box. (*At the mention of Brown, Dion trembles as if suddenly possessed, has a terrible struggle with himself, then while she continues to speak, gets up like an automaton and puts on his mask. The mask is now terribly ravaged. All of its Pan quality has changed into a diabolical Mephistophelean cruelty and irony.*) He doesn't mind the music inside. That gets him somehow. But he thinks the case looks shabby and he wants it junked. But I told him that just because he's been keeping me so long, he needn't start bossing like a husband or I'll – (*She looks up and sees the*

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masked Dion standing by the piano – calmly.) Hello! Getting jealous again?

DION (*jeeringly*). Are you falling in love with your keeper, old Sacred Cow?

CYBEL (*without taking offence*). Cut it! You've been asking me that for years. Be yourself! He's healthy and handsome – but he's too guilty. What makes you pretend you think love is so important, anyway? It's just one of a lot of things you do to keep life living.

DION (*in same tone*). Then you've lied when you've said you loved me, have you, Old Filth?

CYBEL (*affectionately*). You'll never grow up! We've been friends, haven't we, for seven years? I've never let myself want you nor you me. Yes, I love you. It takes all kinds of love to make a world! Ours is the living cream, I say, living rich and high! (*A pause. Coaxingly.*) Stop hiding. I know you.

DION (*taking off his mask, wearily comes and sits down at her feet and lays his head in her lap – with a grateful smile*). You're strong. You always give. You've given my weakness strength to live.

CYBEL (*tenderly, stroking his hair maternally.*) You're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark – and you got afraid. (*After a pause.*) I don't blame your being jealous of Mr. Brown sometimes. I'm jealous of your wife, even though I know you do love her.

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DION (*slowly*). I love Margaret. I don't know who my wife is.

CYBEL (*after a pause — with a queer broken laugh*). Oh, God, sometimes the truth hits me such a sock between the eyes I can see the stars! — and then I'm so damn sorry for the lot of you, every damn mother's son-of-a-gun of you, that I'd like to run out naked into the street and love the whole mob to death like I was bringing you all a new brand of dope that'd make you forget everything that ever was for good! (*Then, with a twisted smile.*) But they wouldn't see me, any more than they see each other. And they keep right on moving along and dying without my help anyway.

DION (*sadly*). You've given me strength to die.

CYBEL. You may be important but your life's not. There's millions of it born every second. Life can cost too much even for a sucker to afford it — like everything else. And it's not sacred — only the you inside is. The rest is earth.

DION (*gets to his knees and with clasped hands looks up raptly and prays with an ascetic fervour*). "Into thy hands, O Lord," . . . (*Then suddenly, with a look of horror.*) Nothing! To feel one's life blown out like the flame of a cheap match . . . ! (*He claps on his mask and laughs harshly.*) To fall asleep and know you'll never, never be called to get on the job of existence again! "Swift be thine approaching flight! Come soon — soon!" (*He quotes this last with a mocking longing.*)

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CYBEL (*pats his head maternally*). There, don't be scared. It's born in the blood. When the time comes, you'll find it's easy.

DION (*jumps to his feet and walks about excitedly*). It won't be long. My wife dragged in a doctor the day before yesterday. He says my heart is gone — booze — He warned me, never another drop or — (*Mockingly*.) What say? Shall we have a drink?

CYBEL (*like an idol*). Suit yourself. It's in the pantry. (*Then, as he hesitates*.) What set you off on this bat? You were raving on about some cathedral plans. . . .

DION (*wildly mocking*). They've been accepted — Mr. Brown's designs! My designs really! You don't need to be told that. He hands me one mathematically correct barn after another and I doctor them up with cute allurements so that fools will desire to buy, sell, breed, sleep, love, hate, curse and pray in them! I do this with devilish cleverness to their entire delight! Once I dreamed of painting wind on the sea and the skimming flight of cloud shadows over the tops of trees! Now . . . (*He laughs*.) But pride is a sin — even in a memory of the long deceased! Blessed are the poor in spirit! (*He subsides weakly on his chair, his hand pressed to his heart*.)

CYBEL (*like an idol*). Go home and sleep. Your wife'll be worried.

DION. She knows — but she'll never admit to herself that her husband ever entered your door.

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(*Mocking.*) Aren't women loyal – to their vanity and their other things!

CYBEL. Brown is coming soon, don't forget.

DION. He knows too and can't admit. Perhaps he needs me here – unknown. What first aroused his passion to possess you exclusively, do you think? Because he knew you loved me and he felt himself cheated. He wanted what he thought was my love of the flesh! He feels I have no right to love. He'd like to steal it as he steals my ideas – complacently – righteously. Oh, the good Brown!

CYBEL. But you like him, too! You're brothers, I guess, somehow. Well, remember he's paying, he'll pay – in some way or other.

DION (*raises his head as if starting to remove the mask*). I know. Poor Billy! God forgive me the evil I've done him!

CYBEL (*reaches out and takes his hand*). Poor boy!

DION (*presses her convulsively – then with forced harshness*). Well, homeward Christian Soldier! I'm off! By-bye, Mother Earth. (*He starts to go off right. She seems about to let him go.*)

CYBEL (*suddenly starts and calls with deep grief*). Dion! (*He looks at her. A pause. He comes slowly back. She speaks strangely in a deep, far-off voice – and yet like a mother talking to her little son.*) You mustn't forget to kiss me before you go, Dion. (*She removes his mask.*) Haven't I told you to take off your mask in the house? Look at me, Dion.

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I've — just — seen — something. I'm afraid you're going away a long, long way. I'm afraid I won't see you again for a long, long time. So it's good-bye, dear. (*She kisses him gently. He begins to sob. She hands him back his mask.*) Here you are. Don't get hurt. Remember, it's all a game, and after you're asleep I'll tuck you in.

DION (*in a choking, heart-broken cry*). Mother! (*Then he claps on his mask with a terrible effort of will — mockingly.*) Go to the devil, you sentimental old pig! See you to-morrow! (*He goes, whistling, slamming the door.*)

CYBEL (*like an idol again*). What's the good of bearing children? What's the use of giving birth to death? (*She sighs wearily, turns, puts a plug in the piano, which starts up its old sentimental tune. At the same moment Brown enters quietly from the left. He is the ideal of the still youthful, good-looking, well-groomed, successful provincial American of forty. Just now, he is plainly perturbed. He is not able to see either Cybel's face or her mask.*)

BROWN. Cybel! (*She starts, jams off the music and reaches for her mask, but has no time to put it on.*) Wasn't that Dion I just saw going out — after all your promises never to see him! (*She turns like an idol, holding the mask behind her. He stares, bewildered — stammers.*) I — I beg your pardon — I thought —

CYBEL (*in her strange voice*). Cybel's gone out to dig in the earth and pray.

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BROWN (*with more assurance*). But — aren't those her clothes?

CYBEL. Cybel doesn't want people to see me naked. I'm her sister. Dion came to see me.

BROWN (*relieved*). So that's what he's up to, is it? (*Then with a pitying sigh.*) Poor Margaret! (*Then with playful reproof.*) You really shouldn't encourage him. He's married and got three big sons.

CYBEL. And you haven't.

BROWN (*stung*). No, I'm not married.

CYBEL. He and I were friends.

BROWN (*with a playful wink*). Yes, I can imagine how the platonic must appeal to Dion's pure, innocent type! It's no good your kidding me about Dion. We've been friends since we were kids. I know him in and out. I've always stood up for him whatever he's done — so you can be perfectly frank. I only spoke as I did on account of Margaret — his wife — it's pretty tough on her.

CYBEL. You love his wife.

BROWN (*scandalized*). What? What are you talking about? (*Then uncertainly.*) Don't be a fool! (*A pause — then as if impelled by an intense curiosity.*) So Dion is your lover, eh? That's very interesting. (*He pulls his chair closer to hers.*) Sit down. Let's talk. (*She continues to stand, the mask held behind her.*) Tell me — I've always been curious — what is it that makes Dion so attractive to women

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— especially certain types of women, if you'll pardon me? He always has been and yet I never could see exactly what they saw in him. Is it his looks — or because he's such a violent sensualist — or because he poses as artistic and temperamental — or because he's so wild — or just what is it?

CYBEL. He's alive!

BROWN (*suddenly takes one of her hands and kisses it — insinuatingly*). Well, don't you think I'm alive, too? (*Eagerly*.) Listen. Would you consider giving up Dion — and letting me take care of you under a similar arrangement to the one I've made with Cybel? I like you, you can see that. I won't bother you much — I'm much too busy — you can do what you like — lead your own life — except for seeing him. (*He stops. A pause. She stares ahead unmoved as if she hadn't heard. He pleads.*) Well — what do you say? Please do!

CYBEL (*her voice very weary*). Cybel asked me to tell you she'd be back next week, Mr. Brown.

BROWN (*with queer agony*). You mean you won't? Don't be so cruel! I love you! (*She walks away. He clutches at her, pleadingly.*) At least — I'll give you anything you ask! — please promise me you won't see Dion Anthony again!

CYBEL (*with deep grief*). He will never see me again, I promise you. Good-bye!

BROWN (*jubilantly, kissing her hand — politely*). Thank you! Thank you! I'm exceedingly grate-

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ful. (*Tactfully.*) I won't disturb you any further. Please forgive my intrusion, and remember me to Cybel when you write. (*He bows, turns, and goes off left.*)

(*Curtain*)

ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

SCENE. *The draughting-room in Brown's office. Dion's draughting table with a high stool in front is at centre. Another stool is to the left of it. At the right is a bench. It is in the evening of the same day. The black wall drop has windows painted on it with a dim, street-lighted view of black houses across the way.*

Dion is sitting on the stool behind the table, reading aloud from the "Imitation of Christ" by Thomas à Kempis to his mask, which is on the table before him. His own face is gentler, more spiritual, more saintlike and ascetic than ever before.

DION (*like a priest, offering up prayers for the dying*). "Quickly must thou be gone from hence, see then how matters stand with thee. Ah, fool – learn now to die to the world that thou mayst begin to live with Christ! Do now, beloved, do now all thou canst because thou knowest not when thou shalt die; nor dost thou know what shall befall thee after death. Keep thyself as a pilgrim, and a stranger upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world do not – belong! Keep thy heart free and raised upwards to God because thou hast not here a lasting abode. 'Because at what hour you know not the Son of Man will come!' " Amen. (*He raises his hand over the mask as if he were bless-*

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ing it, closes the book and puts it back in his pocket. He raises the mask in his hands and stares at it with a pitying tenderness.) Peace, poor tortured one, brave pitiful pride of man, the hour of our deliverance comes. To-morrow we may be with Him in Paradise! *(He kisses it on the lips and sets it down again. There is the noise of footsteps climbing the stairs in the hallway. He grabs up the mask in a sudden panic and, as a knock comes on the door, he claps it on and calls mockingly.)* Come in, Mrs. Anthony, come in!

(Margaret enters. In one hand behind her, hidden from him, is the mask of the brave face she puts on before the world to hide her suffering and disillusionment, and which she has just taken off. Her own face is still sweet and pretty, but lined, drawn and careworn for its years, sad, resigned, but a bit querulous.)

MARGARET *(wearily reproving)*. Thank goodness I've found you! Why haven't you been home the last two days? It's bad enough your drinking again without your staying away and worrying us to death!

DION *(bitterly)*. My ears knew her footsteps. One gets to recognize everything — and to see nothing!

MARGARET. I finally sent the boys out looking for you and came myself. *(With tired solicitude.)*

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I suppose you haven't eaten a thing, as usual. Won't you come home and let me fry you a chop?

DION (*wonderingly*). Can Margaret still love Dion Anthony? Is it possible she does?

MARGARET (*forcing a tired smile*). I suppose so, Dion. I certainly oughtn't to, ought I?

DION (*in same tone*). And I love Margaret! What haunted, haunting ghosts we are! We dimly remember so much it will take us so many million years to forget! (*He comes forward, putting one arm around her bowed shoulders, and they kiss.*)

MARGARET (*patting his hand affectionately*). No, you certainly don't deserve it. When I stop to think of all you've made me go through in the years since we settled down here . . . ! I really don't believe I could ever have stood it if it weren't for the boys! (*Forcing a smile.*) But perhaps I would, I've always been such a big fool about you.

DION (*a bit mockingly*). The boys! Three strong sons! Margaret can afford to be magnanimous!

MARGARET. If they didn't find you, they were coming to meet me here.

DION (*with sudden wildness — torturedly, sinking on his knees beside her*). Margaret! Margaret! I'm lonely! I'm frightened! I'm going away! I've got to say good-bye!

MARGARET (*patting his hair*). Poor boy! Poor Dion! Come home and sleep.

DION (*springs up frantically*). No! I'm a man.

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I'm a lonely man! I can't go back! I have conceived myself! (*Then with desperate mockery.*) Look at me, Mrs. Anthony! It's the last chance! To-morrow I'll have moved on to the next hell! Behold your man – the snivelling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave you have so nobly ignored in the father of your sons! Look! (*He tears the mask from his face, which is radiant with a great pure love for her and a great sympathy and tenderness.*) O woman – my love – that I have sinned against in my sick pride and cruelty – forgive my sins – forgive my solitude – forgive my sickness – forgive me! (*He kneels and kisses the hem of her dress.*)

MARGARET (*who has been staring at him with terror, raising her mask to ward off his face*). Dion! Don't! I can't bear it! You're like a ghost. You're dead! Oh, my God! Help! Help! (*She falls back fainting on the bench. He looks at her – then takes her hand which holds her mask and looks at that face – gently.*) And now I am permitted to understand and love you, too! (*He kisses the mask first – then kisses her face, murmuring.*) And you, sweetheart! Blessed, thrice blessed are the meek!

(*There is a sound of heavy, hurrying footsteps on the stairs. He puts on his mask in haste. The three sons rush into the room. The Eldest is about fourteen, the two others thirteen and twelve. They look healthy, normal, likeable boys, with*

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much the same quality as Billy Brown's in Act One, Scene One. They stop short and stiffen all in a row, staring from the woman on the bench to their father, accusingly.)

ELDEST. We heard some one yell. It sounded like Mother.

DION (*defensively*). No. It was this lady — my wife.

ELDEST. But hasn't Mother come yet?

DION (*going to Margaret*). Yes. Your Mother is here. (*He stands between them and puts her mask over Margaret's face — then steps back.*) She has fainted. You'd better bring her to.

BOYS. Mother! (*They run to her side, kneel and rub her wrists. The Eldest smooths back her hair.*)

DION (*watching them*). At least I am leaving her well provided for. (*He addresses them directly.*) Tell your mother she'll get word from Mr. Brown's house. I must pay him a farewell call. I am going. Good-bye. (*They stop, staring at him fixedly, with eyes a mixture of bewilderment, distrust and hurt.*)

ELDEST (*awkwardly and shamefacedly*). Honest, I think you ought to have . . .

SECOND. Yes, honest you ought . . .

YOUNGEST. Yes, honest . . .

DION (*in a friendly tone*). I know. But I couldn't.

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That's for you who can. You must inherit the earth for her. Don't forget now, boys. Good-bye.

BOYS (*in the same awkward, self-conscious tone, one after another*). Good-bye – good-bye – good-bye.
(*Dion goes.*)

(*Curtain*)

ACT TWO

SCENE THREE

SCENE. *The library of William Brown's home — night of the same day. A backdrop of carefully painted, prosperous, bourgeois culture, book-cases filled with sets, etc. The heavy table at centre is expensive. The leather arm-chair at left of it and the couch at right are opulently comfortable. The reading lamp on the table is the only light.*

Brown sits in the chair at left reading an architectural periodical. His expression is composed and gravely receptive. In outline, his face suggests a Roman consul on an old coin. There is an incongruous distinction about it, the quality of unquestioning faith in the finality of its achievement.

There is a sudden loud thumping on the front door and the ringing of the bell. Brown frowns and listens as a servant answers. Dion's voice can be heard, raised mockingly.

DION. Tell him it's the devil come to conclude a bargain.

BROWN *(suppressing annoyance, calls out with forced good nature)*. Come on in, Dion. *(Dion enters. He is in a wild state. His clothes are dishevelled, his masked face has a terrible deathlike intensity, its mocking irony becomes so cruelly malignant*

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as to give him the appearance of a real demon, tortured into torturing others.) Sit down.

DION (*stands and sings*). William Brown's soul lies mouldering in the crib, but his body goes marching on!

BROWN (*maintaining the same indulgent, big-brotherly tone, which he tries to hold throughout the scene.*) Not so loud, for Pete's sake! I don't mind – but I've got neighbours.

DION. Hate them! Fear thy neighbour as thyself! That's the leaden rule for the safe and sane. (*Then advancing to the table with a sort of deadly calm.*) Listen! One day when I was four years old, a boy sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him! I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born! Every one called me cry-baby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty. And that other boy, secretly he felt ashamed but he couldn't acknowledge it; so from that day he instinctively developed into the good boy, the good friend, the good man, William Brown!

BROWN (*shamefacedly*). I remember now. It

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was a dirty trick. (*Then with a trace of resentment.*) Sit down. You know where the booze is. Have a drink, if you like. But I guess you've had enough already.

DION (*looks at him fixedly for a moment — then strangely*). Thanks be to Brown for reminding me. I must drink. (*He goes and gets a bottle of whisky and a glass.*)

BROWN (*with a good-humoured shrug*). All right. It's your funeral.

DION (*returning and pouring out a big drink in the tumbler*). And William Brown's! When I die, he goes to hell! Shöäl! (*He drinks and stares malevolently. In spite of himself, Brown is uneasy. A pause.*)

BROWN (*with forced casualness*). You've been on this toot for a week now.

DION (*tauntingly*). I've been celebrating the acceptance of my design for the cathedral.

BROWN (*humorously*). You certainly helped me a lot on it.

DION (*with a harsh laugh*). O perfect Brown! Never mind! I'll make him look in my mirror yet — and drown in it! (*He pours out another big drink.*)

BROWN (*rather tauntingly*). Go easy. I don't want your corpse on my hands.

DION. But I do. (*He drinks.*) Brown will still need me — to reassure him he's alive! I've loved,

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lusted, won and lost, sung and wept! I've been life's lover! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her or she requests you to destroy yourself.

BROWN (*good-naturedly*). Nonsense. Go home and get some sleep.

DION (*as if he hadn't heard – bitingly*). But to be neither creature nor creator! To exist only in her indifference! To be unloved by life! (*Brown stirs uneasily.*) To be merely a successful freak, the result of some snide neutralizing of life forces – a spineless cactus – a wild boar of the mountains altered into a packer's hog eating to become food – a Don Juan inspired to romance by a monkey's glands – and to have Life not even think you funny enough to see!

BROWN (*stung – angrily*). Bosh!

DION. Consider Mr. Brown. His parents bore him on earth as if they were thereby entering him in a baby parade with prizes for the fattest – and he's still being wheeled along in the procession, too fat now to learn to walk, let alone to dance or run, and he'll never live until his liberated dust quickens into earth!

BROWN (*gruffly*). Rave on! (*Then with forced good-nature.*) Well, Dion, at any rate, I'm satisfied.

DION (*quickly and malevolently*). No! Brown isn't satisfied! He's piled on layers of protective

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fat, but vaguely, deeply he feels at his heart the gnawing of a doubt ! And I'm interested in that germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in his blood, because it's part of the creative life Brown's stolen from me!

BROWN (*forcing a sour grin*). Steal germs? I thought you caught them.

DION (*as if he hadn't heard*). It's mine — and I'm interested in seeing it thrive and breed and become multitudes and eat until Brown is consumed!

BROWN (*cannot restrain a shudder*). Sometimes when you're drunk, you're positively evil; do you know it?

DION (*sombrely*). When Pan was forbidden the light and warmth of the sun he grew sensitive and self-conscious and proud and revengeful — and became Prince of Darkness.

BROWN (*jocularly*). You don't fit the rôle of Pan, Dion. It sounds to me like Bacchus, alias the Demon Rum, doing the talking. (*Dion recovers from his spasm with a start and stares at Brown with terrible hatred. There is a pause. In spite of himself, Brown squirms and adopts a placating tone.*) Go home. It's all well enough celebrating our design being accepted, but —

DION (*in a steely voice*). I've been the brains! I've been the design! I've designed even his success — drunk and laughing at him — laughing at his career! Not proud! Sick! Sick of myself and him! Designing and getting drunk? Saving

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my woman and children! (*He laughs.*) Ha! And this cathedral is my masterpiece! It will make Brown the most eminent architect in this state of God's Country. I put a lot into it — what was left of my life! It's one vivid blasphemy from pavement to the tips of its spires! — but so concealed that the fools will never know. They'll kneel and worship the ironic Silenus who tells them the best good is never to be born! (*He laughs triumphantly.*) Well, blasphemy is faith, isn't it? In self-preservation the devil must believe! But Mr. Brown, the Great Brown, has no faith! He couldn't design a cathedral without it looking like the First Supernatural Bank! He only believes in the immortality of the moral belly! (*He laughs wildly — then sinks down in his chair, gasping, his hands pressed to his heart. Then suddenly becomes deadly calm and pronounces like a cruel malignant condemnation.*) From now on, Brown will never design anything. He will devote his life to renovating the house of my Cybel into a home for my Margaret!

BROWN (*springing to his feet, his face convulsed with strange agony*). I've stood enough! How dare you . . .!

DION (*his voice like a probe*). Why has no woman ever loved him? Why has he always been the Big Brother, the Friend? Isn't their trust — a contempt?

BROWN. You lie!

DION. Why has he never been able to love —

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since my Margaret? Why has he never married? Why has he tried to steal Cybel, as he once tried to steal Margaret? Isn't it out of revenge – and envy?

BROWN (*violently*). Rot! I wanted Cybel, and I bought her!

DION. Brown bought her for me! She has loved me more than he will ever know!

BROWN. You lie! (*Then furiously.*) I'll throw her back on the street!

DION. To me! To her fellow-creature! Why hasn't Brown had children – he who loves children – he who loves *my* children – he who envies me *my* children?

BROWN (*brokenly*). I'm not ashamed to envy you them!

DION. They like Brown, too – as a friend – as an equal – as Margaret has always liked him –

BROWN (*brokenly*). And as I've liked her!

DION. How many million times Brown has thought how much better for her it would have been if she'd chosen him instead!

BROWN (*torturedly*). You lie! (*Then with sudden frenzied defiance.*) All right! If you force me to say it, I do love Margaret! I always have loved her and you've always known I did!

DION (*with a terrible composure*). No! That is merely the appearance, not the truth! Brown loves

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me! He loves me because I have always possessed the power he needed for love, because I am love!

BROWN (*frenziedly*). You drunken fool! (*He leaps on Dion and grabs him by the throat.*)

DION (*triumphantly, staring into his eyes*). Ah! Now he looks into the mirror! Now he sees his face!

(*Brown lets go of him and staggers back to his chair, pale and trembling.*)

BROWN (*humbly*). Stop, for God's sake! You're mad!

DION (*sinking in his chair, more and more weakly*). I'm done. My heart, not Brown — (*Mockingly.*) My last will and testament! I leave Dion Anthony to William Brown — for him to love and obey — for him to become me — then my Margaret will love me — my children will love me — Mr. and Mrs. Brown and sons, happily ever after! (*Staggering to his full height and looking upward defiantly.*) Nothing more — but Man's last gesture — by which he conquers — to laugh! Ha — (*He begins, stops as if paralysed, and drops on his knees by Brown's chair, his mask falling off, his Christian Martyr's face at the point of death.*) Forgive me, Billy. Bury me, hide me, forget me for your own happiness! May Margaret love you! May you design the Temple of Man's Soul! Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit! (*He kisses Brown's feet — then more and more weakly and childishly.*)

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What was the prayer, Billy? I'm getting so sleepy. . . .

BROWN (*in a trancelike tone*). "Our Father who art in Heaven."

DION (*drowsily*). "Our Father." . . .

(*He dies. A pause. Brown remains in a stupor for a moment — then stirs himself, puts his hand on Dion's breast.*)

BROWN (*dully*). He's dead — at last. (*He says this mechanically, but the last two words awaken him — wondering.*) At last? (*Then with triumph.*) At last! (*He stares at Dion's real face contemptuously.*) So that's the poor weakling you really were! No wonder you hid! And I've always been afraid of you — yes, I'll confess it now, in awe of you! Paugh! (*He picks up the mask from the floor.*) No, not of you! Of this! Say what you like, it's strong if it is bad! And this is what Margaret loved, not you! Not you! This man! — this man who willed himself to me! (*Struck by an idea, he jumps to his feet.*) By God! (*He slowly starts to put the mask on. A knocking comes on the street door. He starts guiltily, laying the mask on the table. Then he picks it up again quickly, takes the dead body and carries it off left. He reappears immediately and goes to the front door as the knocking recommences — gruffly.*) Hello! Who's there?

MARGARET. It's Margaret, Billy. I'm looking for Dion.

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BROWN (*uncertainly*). Oh — all right — (*Unfastening door.*) Come in. Hello, Margaret. Hello, Boys! He's here. He's asleep. I — I was just dozing off too.

(*Margaret enters. She is wearing her mask.
The three sons are with her.*)

MARGARET (*seeing the bottle, forcing a laugh*). Has he been celebrating?

BROWN (*with strange glibness now*). No. I was. He wasn't. He said he'd sworn off to-night — for ever — for your sake — and the kids!

MARGARET (*with amazed joy*). Dion said that? (*Then hastily defensive.*) But of course he never does drink much. Where is he?

BROWN. Upstairs. I'll wake him. He felt bad. He took off his clothes to take a bath before he lay down. You just wait here.

(*She sits in the chair where Dion had sat and stares straight before her. The Sons group around her, as if for a family photo. Brown hurries out left.*)

MARGARET. It's late to keep you boys up. Aren't you sleepy?

BOYS. No, Mother.

MARGARET (*proudly*). I'm glad to have three such strong boys to protect me.

ELDEST (*boastingly*). We'd kill anyone that touched you, wouldn't we?

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NEXT. You bet! We'd make him wish he hadn't!

YOUNGEST. You bet!

MARGARET. You're Mother's brave boys! (*She laughs fondly - then curiously.*) Do you like Mr. Brown?

ELDEST. Sure thing! He's a regular fellow.

NEXT. He's all right!

YOUNGEST. Sure thing!

MARGARET (*half to herself*). Your father claims he steals his ideas.

ELDEST (*with a sheepish grin*). I'll bet father said that when he was - just talking.

NEXT. Mr. Brown doesn't have to steal, does he?

YOUNGEST. I should say not! He's awful rich.

MARGARET. Do you love your father?

ELDEST (*scuffling - embarrassed*). Why - of course -

NEXT (*ditto*). Sure thing!

YOUNGEST. Sure I do.

MARGARET (*with a sigh*). I think you'd better start on before - right now - before your father comes - He'll be very sick and nervous and he'll want to be quiet. So run along!

BOYS. All right.

(*They file out and close the front door as Brown, dressed in Dion's clothes and wearing his mask, appears at left.*)

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MARGARET (*taking off her mask, gladly*). Dion! (*She stares wonderingly at him and he at her; goes to him and puts an arm around him.*) Poor dear, do you feel sick? (*He nods.*) But you look — (*squeezing his arms*) — why, you actually feel stronger and better already! Is it true what Billy told me — about your swearing off for ever? (*He nods. She exclaims intensely.*) Oh, if you'll only — and get well — we can still be so happy! Give Mother a kiss. (*They kiss. A shudder passes through both of them. She breaks away laughing with aroused desire.*) Why, Dion? Aren't you ashamed? You haven't kissed me like that for ages!

BROWN (*his voice imitating Dion's and muffled by the mask*). I've wanted to, Margaret!

MARGARET (*gaily and coquettishly now*). Were you afraid I'd spurn you? Why, Dion, something has happened. It's like a miracle! Even your voice is changed! It actually sounds younger; do you know it? (*Then, solicitously.*) But you must be worn out. Let's go home. (*With an impulsive movement she flings her arms wide open, throwing her mask away from her as if suddenly no longer needing it.*) Oh, I'm beginning to feel so happy, Dion — so happy!

BROWN (*stifledly*). Let's go home. (*She puts her arm around him. They walk to the door.*)

(Curtain)

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

SCENE. *The draughting-room and private office of Brown are both shown. The former is on the left, the latter on the right of a dividing wall at the centre. The arrangement of furniture in each room is the same as in previous scenes. It is ten in the morning of a day about a month later. The backdrop for both rooms is of plain wall with a few tacked-up designs and blue prints painted on it.*

Two Draughtsmen, a middle-aged and a young man, both stoop-shouldered, are sitting on stools behind what was formerly Dion's table. They are tracing plans. They talk as they work.

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. W. B. is late again.

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Wonder what's got into him the last month? (*A pause. They work silently.*)

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. Yes, ever since he fired Dion. . . .

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Funny his firing him all of a sudden like that. (*A pause. They work.*)

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. I haven't seen Dion around town since then. Have you?

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. No, not since Brown told us he'd sacked him. I suppose he's off drowning his sorrow!

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OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. I heard some one had seen him at home and he was sober and looking fine. (*A pause. They work.*)

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. What got into Brown? They say he fired all his old servants that same day and only uses his house to sleep in.

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN (*with a sneer*). Artistic temperament, maybe — the real name of which is swelled head! (*There is a noise of footsteps from the hall. Warningly.*) Ssutt!

(They bend over their table. Margaret enters. She does not need to wear a mask now. Her face has regained the self-confident spirit of its youth, her eyes shine with happiness.)

MARGARET (*heartily*). Good morning! What a lovely day!

BOTH (*perfunctorily*). Good morning, Mrs. Anthony.

MARGARET (*looking around*). You've been changing around in here, haven't you? Where is Dion? (*They stare at her.*) I forgot to tell him something important this morning and our phone's out of order. So if you'll tell him I'm here — (*They don't move. A pause. Margaret says stiffly.*) Oh, I realize Mr. Brown has given strict orders Dion is not to be disturbed, but surely. . . . (*Sharply.*) Where is my husband, please?

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. We don't know.

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MARGARET. You don't know?

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. We haven't seen him.

MARGARET. Why, he left home at eight-thirty!

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. To come here?

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. This morning?

MARGARET (*provoked*). Why, of course, to come here — as he does every day! (*They stare at her. A pause.*)

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN (*evasively*). We haven't seen him.

MARGARET (*with asperity*). Where is Mr. Brown?

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN (*at a noise of footsteps from the hall — sulkily*). Coming now.

(*Brown enters. He is now wearing a mask which is an exact likeness of his face as it was in the last scene — the self-assured success. When he sees Margaret, he starts back apprehensively.*)

BROWN (*immediately controlling himself — breezily*). Hello, Margaret! This is a pleasant surprise! (*He holds out his hand.*)

MARGARET (*hardly taking it — reservedly*). Good morning.

BROWN (*turning quickly to the Draughtsmen*). I hope you explained to Mrs. Anthony how busy Dion . . .

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MARGARET (*interrupting him – stiffly*). I certainly can't understand –

BROWN (*hastily*). I'll explain. Come in here and be comfortable. (*He throws open the door and ushers her into his private office.*)

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. Dion must be putting over some bluff on her.

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Pretending he's still here – and Brown's helping him. . . .

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. But why should Brown, after he . . . ?

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Well, I suppose — Search me. (*They work.*)

BROWN. Have a chair, Margaret. (*She sits on the chair stiffly. He sits behind the desk.*)

MARGARET (*coldly*). I'd like some explanation. . . .

BROWN (*coaxingly*). Now, don't get angry, Margaret! Dion is hard at work on his design for the new State Capitol, and I don't want him disturbed, not even by you! So be a good sport! It's for his own good, remember! I asked him to explain to you.

MARGARET (*relenting*). He told me you'd agreed to ask me and the boys not to come here – but then, we hardly ever did.

BROWN. But you might! (*Then with confidential friendliness.*) This is for his sake, Margaret. I

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know Dion. He's got to be able to work without distractions. He's not the ordinary man; you appreciate that. And this design means his whole future! He's to get full credit for it, and as soon as it's accepted, I take him into partnership. It's all agreed. And after that I'm going to take a long vacation — go to Europe for a couple of years — and leave everything here in Dion's hands! Hasn't he told you all this?

MARGARET (*joyful now*). Yes — but I could hardly believe . . . (*Proudly*.) I'm sure he can do it. He's been like a new man lately, so full of ambition and energy! It's made me so happy! (*She stops in confusion*.)

BROWN (*deeply moved, takes her hand impulsively*). And it has made me happy, too!

MARGARET (*confused — with an amused laugh*). Why, Billy Brown! For a moment, I thought it was Dion, your voice sounded so much . . .!

BROWN (*with sudden desperation*). Margaret, I've got to tell you! I can't go on like this any longer! I've got to confess. . . .! There's something. . .!

MARGARET (*alarmed*). Not — not about Dion?

BROWN (*harshly*). To hell with Dion! To hell with Billy Brown! (*He tears off his mask and reveals a suffering face that is ravaged and haggard, his own face tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion's mask*.) Think of me! I love you, Mar-

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garet! Leave him! I've always loved you! Come away with me! I'll sell out here! We'll go abroad and be happy!

MARGARET (*amazed*). Billy Brown, do you realize what you're saying? (*With a shudder.*) Are you crazy? Your face—is terrible. You're sick! Shall I phone for a doctor?

BROWN (*turning away slowly and putting on his mask—dully.*) No. I've been on the verge—of a breakdown—for some time. I get spells. . . . I'm better now. (*He turns back to her.*) Forgive me! Forget what I said! But, for all our sakes, don't come here again.

MARGARET (*coldly*). After this—I assure you . . . ! (*Then looking at him with pained incredulity.*) Why, Billy—I simply won't believe—after all these years. . . .!

BROWN. It will never happen again. Good-bye.

MARGARET. Good-bye. (*Then, wishing to leave on a pleasant change of subject—forcing a smile.*) Don't work Dion to death! He's never home for dinner any more.

(*She goes out past the Draughtsmen and off right, rear. Brown sits down at his desk, taking off the mask again. He stares at it with bitter, cynical amusement.*)

BROWN. You're dead, William Brown, dead beyond hope of resurrection! It's the Dion you

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buried in your garden who killed you, not you him! It's Margaret's husband who . . . (*He laughs harshly.*) Paradise by proxy! Love by mistaken identity! God! (*This is almost a prayer — then fiercely defiant.*) But it is paradise! I do love!

(As he is speaking, a well-dressed, important, stout man enters the draughting-room. He is carrying a rolled-up plan in his hand. He nods condescendingly and goes directly to Brown's door, on which he raps sharply, and, without waiting for an answer, turns the knob. Brown has just time to turn his head and get his mask on.)

MAN (*briskly*). Ah, good morning! I came right in. Hope I didn't disturb . . .?

BROWN (*the successful architect now — urbanely*). Not at all, sir. How are you? (*They shake hands.*) Sit down. Have a cigar. And now what can I do for you this morning?

MAN (*unrolling his plan*). It's your plan. My wife and I have been going over it again. We like it — and we don't — and when a man plans to lay out half a million, why he wants everything exactly right, eh? (*Brown nods.*) It's too cold, too spare, too like a tomb, if you'll pardon me, for a liveable home. Can't you liven it up, put in some decorations, make it fancier and warmer — you know what I mean. (*Looks at him a bit doubtfully.*) People tell me you had an assistant, Anthony,

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who was a real shark on these details but that you've fired him —

BROWN (*suavely*). Gossip! He's still with me but, for reasons of his own, doesn't wish it known. Yes, I trained him and he's very ingenious. I'll turn this right over to him and instruct him to carry out your wishes.

(*Curtain*)

ACT THREE

SCENE TWO

SCENE. *The same as Act Two, Scene Three – the library of Brown's home about eight the same night. He can be heard feeling his way in through the dark. He switches on the reading lamp on the table. Directly under it on a sort of stand is the mask of Dion, its empty eyes staring front.*

Brown takes off his own mask and lays it on the table before Dion's. He flings himself down in the chair and stares without moving into the eyes of Dion's mask. Finally, he begins to talk to it in a bitter, mocking tone.)

BROWN. Listen! To-day was a narrow escape – for us! We can't avoid discovery much longer. We must get our plot to working! We've already made William Brown's will, leaving you his money and business. We must hustle off to Europe now – and murder him there! (*A bit tauntingly.*) Then you – the I in you – I will live with Margaret happily ever after. (*More tauntingly.*) She will have children by me! (*He seems to hear some mocking denial from the mask. He bends toward it.*) What? (*Then with a sneer.*) Anyway, that doesn't matter! Your children already love me more than they ever loved you! And Margaret loves me more! You think you've won, do you – that I've got to vanish into you in order to

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live? Not yet, my friend! Never! Wait! Gradually Margaret will love what is beneath – me! Little by little I'll teach her to know me, and then finally I'll reveal myself to her, and confess that I stole your place out of love for her, and she'll understand and forgive and love me! And you'll be forgotten! Ha! (*Again he bends down to the mask as if listening – torturedly.*) What's that? She'll never believe? She'll never see? She'll never understand? You lie, devil! (*He reaches out his hands as if to take the mask by the throat, then shrinks back with a shudder of hopeless despair.*) God have mercy! Let me believe! Blessed are the merciful! Let me obtain mercy! (*He waits, his face upturned – pleadingly.*) Not yet? (*Despairingly.*) Never? (*A pause. Then, in a sudden panic of dread, he reaches out for the mask of Dion like a dope fiend after a drug. As soon as he holds it, he seems to gain strength and is able to force a sad laugh.*) Now I am drinking your strength, Dion – strength to love in this world and die and sleep and become fertile earth, as you are becoming now in my garden – your weakness the strength of my flowers, your failure as an artist painting their petals with life! (*Then, with bravado.*) Come with me while Margaret's bridegroom dresses in your clothes, Mr. Anthony! I need the devil when I'm in the dark! (*He goes off left, but can be heard talking.*) Your clothes begin to fit me better than my own! Hurry, Brother! It's time we were home. Our wife is waiting! (*He reappears, having changed his*

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coat and trousers.) Come with me and tell her again I love her! Come and hear her tell me how she loves you! *(He suddenly cannot help kissing the mask.)* I love you because she loves you! My kisses on your lips are for her! *(He puts the mask over his face and stands for a moment, seeming to grow tall and proud – then with a laugh of bold self-assurance.)* Out by the back way! I mustn't forget I'm a desperate criminal, pursued by God, and by myself! *(He goes out right, laughing with amused satisfaction.)*

(Curtain)

ACT THREE

SCENE THREE

SCENE. *Is the same as Scene One of Act One — the sitting-room of Margaret's home. It is about half an hour after the last scene. Margaret sits on the sofa, waiting with the anxious, impatient expectancy of one deeply in love. She is dressed with a careful, subtle extra touch to attract the eye. She looks young and happy. She is trying to read a book. The front door is heard opening and closing. She leaps up and runs back to throw her arms around Brown as he enters from right, rear. She kisses him passionately.*

MARGARET (*as he recoils with a sort of guilt — laughingly*). Why, you hateful old thing, you! I really believe you were trying to avoid kissing me! Well, just for that, I'll never . . .

BROWN (*with fierce, defiant passion, kisses her again and again*). Margaret!

MARGARET. Call me Peggy again. You used to when you really loved me. (*Softly*.) Remember the school commencement dance — you and I on the dock in the moonlight?

BROWN (*with pain*). No. (*He takes his arms from around her*.)

MARGARET (*still holding him — with a laugh*). Well, I like that! You old bear, you! Why not?

BROWN (*sadly*). It was so long ago.

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MARGARET (*a bit melancholy*). You mean you don't want to be reminded that we're getting old?

BROWN. Yes. (*He kisses her gently.*) I'm tired. Let's sit down. (*They sit on the sofa, his arm about her, her head on his shoulder.*)

MARGARET (*with a happy sigh*). I don't mind remembering – now I'm happy. It's only when I'm unhappy that it hurts – and I've been so happy lately, dear – and so grateful to you! (*He stirs uneasily. She goes on joyfully.*) Everything's changed! I'd got pretty resigned to – and sad and hopeless, too – and then all at once you turn right around and everything is the same as when we were first married – much better even, for I was never sure of you then. You were always so strange and aloof and alone, it seemed I was never really touching you. But now I feel you've become quite human – like me – and I'm so happy, dear! (*She kisses him.*)

BROWN (*his voice trembling*). Then I have made you happy – happier than ever before – no matter what happens? (*She nods.*) Then – that justifies everything! (*He forces a laugh.*)

MARGARET. Of course it does! I've always known that. But you – you wouldn't be – or you couldn't be – and I could never help you – and all the time I knew you were so lonely! I could always hear you calling to me that you were lost, but I couldn't find the path to you because I was lost, too! That's an awful way for a wife to feel!

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(*She laughs – joyfully.*) But now you're here! You're mine! You're my long-lost lover, and my husband, and my big boy, too!

BROWN (*with a trace of jealousy*). Where are your other big boys to-night?

MARGARET. Out to a dance. They've all acquired girls, I'll have you know.

BROWN (*mockingly*). Aren't you jealous?

MARGARET (*gaily*). Of course! Terribly! But I'm diplomatic. I don't let them see. (*Changing the subject.*) Believe me, they've noticed the change in you! The eldest was saying to me to-day: "It's great not to have Father so nervous, any more. Why, he's a regular sport when he gets started!" And the other two said very solemnly: "You bet!" (*She laughs.*)

BROWN (*brokenly*). I – I'm glad.

MARGARET. Dion! You're crying!

BROWN (*stung by the name, gets up – harshly*). Nonsense! Did you ever know Dion to cry about anyone?

MARGARET (*sadly*). You couldn't – then. You were too lonely. You had no one to cry to.

BROWN (*goes and takes a rolled-up plan from the table drawer – dully*). I've got to do some work.

MARGARET (*disappointedly*). What, has that old Billy Brown got you to work at home again, too?

BROWN (*ironically*). It's for Dion's good, you know – and yours.

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MARGARET (*making the best of it — cheerfully*). All right, I won't be selfish. It really makes me proud for you to be so ambitious. Let me help.

(*She brings his drawing-board, which he puts on the table and pins his plan upon. She sits on sofa and picks up her book.*)

BROWN (*carefully casual*). I hear you were in to see me to-day?

MARGARET. Yes, and Billy wouldn't hear of it! I was quite furious until he convinced me it was all for the best. When is he going to take you into partnership?

BROWN. Very soon now.

MARGARET. And will he really give you full charge when he goes abroad?

BROWN. Yes.

MARGARET (*practically*). I'd pin him down if I could. Promises are all right, but — (*she hesitates*) I don't trust him.

BROWN (*with a start, sharply*). What makes you say that?

MARGARET. Oh, something that happened to-day.

BROWN. What?

MARGARET. I don't mean I blame him, but — to be frank, I think the Great God Brown, as you call him, is getting a bit queer and it's time he took a vacation. Don't you?

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BROWN (*his voice a bit excited – but guardedly*). But why? What did he do?

MARGARET (*hesitatingly*). Well – it's really too silly – he suddenly got awfully strange. His face scared me. It was like a corpse. Then he raved on some nonsense about he'd always loved me. He went on like a perfect fool! (*She looks at Brown, who is staring at her. She becomes uneasy.*) Maybe I shouldn't tell you this. He simply wasn't responsible. Then he came to himself and was all right and begged my pardon and seemed dreadfully sorry, and I felt sorry for him. (*Then with a shudder.*) But honestly, Dion, it was just too disgusting for words to hear him! (*With kind, devastating contempt.*) Poor Billy!

BROWN (*with a show of tortured derision*). Poor Billy! Poor Billy the Goat! (*With mocking frenzy.*) I'll kill him for you! I'll serve you his heart for breakfast!

MARGARET (*jumping up – frightenedly*). Dion!

BROWN (*waving his pencil knife with grotesque flourishes*). I tell you I'll murder this God-damned disgusting Great God Brown who stands like a fatted calf in the way of our health and wealth and happiness!

MARGARET (*bewilderedly, not knowing how much is pretending, puts an arm about him*). Don't, dear! You're being horrid and strange again. It makes me afraid you haven't really changed, after all.

BROWN (*unheeding*). And then my wife can be

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happy! Ha! (*He laughs. She begins to cry. He controls himself – pats her head – gently.*) All right, dear. Mr. Brown is now safely in hell. Forget him!

MARGARET (*stops crying – but still worriedly*). I should never have told you – but I never imagined you'd take it seriously. I've never thought of Billy Brown except as a friend, and lately not even that! He's just a stupid old fool!

BROWN. Ha-ha! Didn't I say he was in hell? They're torturing him! (*Then controlling himself again – exhaustedly.*) Please leave me alone now. I've got to work.

MARGARET. All right, dear. I'll go into the next room and anything you want, just call. (*She pats his face – cajolingly.*) Is it all forgotten?

BROWN. Will you be happy?

MARGARET. Yes.

BROWN. Then it's dead, I promise! (*She kisses him and goes out. He stares ahead, then shakes off his thoughts and concentrates on his work – mockingly.*) Our beautiful new Capitol calls you, Mr. Dion! To work! We'll adroitly hide old Silenus on the cupola! Let him dance over their law-making with his eternal leer! (*He bends over his work.*)

(Curtain)

ACT FOUR

SCENE ONE

SCENE. *Same as Scene One of Act Three — the draughting-room and Brown's office. It is dusk of a day about a month later.*

The two draughtsmen are bent over their table, working.

Brown, at his desk, is working feverishly over a plan. He is wearing the mask of Dion. The mask of William Brown rests on the desk beside him. As he works, he chuckles with malicious glee — finally flings down his pencil with a flourish.

BROWN. Done! In the name of the Almighty Brown, amen, amen! Here's a wondrous fair capitol! The design would do just as well for a Home for Criminal Imbeciles! Yet to them, such is my art, it will appear to possess a pure common-sense, a fat-bellied finality, as dignified as the suspenders of an assemblyman! Only to me will that pompous façade reveal itself as the wearily ironic grin of Pan as, his ears drowsy with the crumbling hum of past and future civilizations, he half-listens to the laws passed by his fleas to enslave him! Ha-ha-ha! *(He leaps grotesquely from behind his desk and cuts a few goatish capers, laughing with lustful merriment.)* Long live Chief of Police Brown! District Attorney Brown! Alderman Brown! Assemblyman Brown! Mayor Brown!

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Congressman Brown! Governor Brown! Senator Brown! President Brown! (*He chants.*) Oh, how many persons in one God make up the good God Brown? Hahahaha! (*The two Draughtsmen in the next room have stopped work and are listening.*)

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Drunk as a fool!

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. At least Dion used to have the decency to stay away from the office —

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. Funny how it's got hold of Brown so quick!

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN. He was probably hitting it up on the Q.T. all the time.

BROWN (*has come back to his desk, laughing to himself and out of breath*). Time to become respectable again! (*He takes off the Dion mask and reaches out for the William Brown one — then stops, with a hand on each, staring down on the plan with fascinated loathing. His real face is now sick, ghastly, tortured, hollow-cheeked and feverish-eyed.*) Ugly! Hideous! Despicable! Why must the demon in me pander to cheapness — then punish me with self-loathing and life-hatred? Why am I not strong enough to perish — or blind enough to be content? (*To heaven, bitterly but pleadingly.*) Give me the strength to destroy this! — and myself! — and him! — and I will believe in Thee! (*While he has been speaking there has been a noise from the stairs. The two Draughtsmen have bent over their work. Margaret enters, closing the door behind her. At this sound, Brown starts. He immediately senses who it is*

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— *with alarm.*) Margaret! (*He grabs up both masks and goes into room off right.*)

MARGARET (*she looks healthy and happy, but her face wears a worried, solicitous expression — pleasantly to the staring Draughtsmen.*) Good morning. Oh, you needn't look worried, it's Mr. Brown I want to see, not my husband.

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN (*hesitatingly*). He's locked himself in — but maybe if you'll knock —

MARGARET (*knocks — somewhat embarrassedly*). Mr. Brown!

(*Brown enters his office, wearing the William Brown mask. He comes quickly to the other door and unlocks it.*)

BROWN (*with a hectic cordiality*). Come on, Margaret! Enter! This is delightful! Sit down! What can I do for you?

MARGARET (*taken aback — a bit stiffly*). Nothing much.

BROWN. Something about Dion, of course. Well, your darling pet is all right — never better!

MARGARET (*coldly*). That's a matter of opinion. I think you're working him to death.

BROWN. Oh, no, not him. It's Brown who is to die. We've agreed on that.

MARGARET (*giving him a queer look*). I'm serious.

BROWN. So am I. Deadly serious! Hahaha!

MARGARET (*checking her indignation*). That's

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what I came to see you about. Really, Dion has acted so hectic and on edge lately I'm sure he's on the verge of a breakdown.

BROWN. Well, it certainly isn't drink. He hasn't had a drop. He doesn't need it! Haha! And I haven't either, although the gossips are beginning to say I'm soused all the time! It's because I've started to laugh! Hahaha! They can't believe in joy in this town except by the bottle! What funny little people! Hahaha! When you're the Great God Brown, eh, Margaret? Hahaha!

MARGARET (*getting up - uneasily*). I'm afraid I -

BROWN. Don't be afraid, my dear! I won't make love to you again! Honour bright! I'm too near the grave for such folly! But it must have been funny for you when you came here the last time - watching a disgusting old fool like me, eh? - too funny for words! Hahaha! (*Then with a sudden movement he flourishes the design before her.*) Look! We've finished it! Dion has finished it! His fame is made!

MARGARET (*tartly*). Really, Billy, I believe you are drunk!

BROWN. Nobody kisses me - so you can all believe the worst! Hahaha!

MARGARET (*chillingly*). Then if Dion is through, why can't I see him?

BROWN (*crazily*). See Dion? See Dion? Well,

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why not? It's an age of miracles. The streets are full of Lazaruses. Pray! I mean — wait a moment, if you please.

(Brown disappears into the room off right. A moment later he reappears in the mask of Dion. He holds out his arms and Margaret rushes into them. They kiss passionately. Finally he sits with her on the lounge.)

MARGARET. So you've finished it.

BROWN. Yes. The Committee is coming to see it soon. I've made all the changes they'll like, the fools!

MARGARET *(lovingly)*. And can we go on that second honeymoon, right away now?

BROWN. In a week or so, I hope — as soon as I've got Brown off to Europe.

MARGARET. Tell me — isn't he drinking hard?

BROWN *(laughing as Brown did)*. Haha! Soused to the ears all the time! Soused on life! He can't stand it! It's burning his insides out!

MARGARET *(alarmed)*. Dear! I'm worried about you. You sound as crazy as he did — when you laugh! You must rest!

BROWN *(controlling himself)*. I'll rest in peace — when he's gone!

MARGARET *(with a queer look)*. Why, Dion, that isn't your suit. It's just like —

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BROWN. It's his! We're getting to be like twins. I'm inheriting his clothes already! (*Then calming himself as he sees how frightened she is.*) Don't be worried, dear. I'm just a trifle elated, now the job's done. I guess I'm a bit soused on life, too!

(*The Committee, three important-looking, average personages, come into the draughting-room.*)

MARGARET (*forcing a smile.*) Well, don't let it burn *your* insides out!

BROWN. No danger! Mine were tempered in hell! Hahaha!

MARGARET (*kissing him, coaxingly.*) Come home, dear — please!

OLDER DRAUGHTSMAN (*knocks on the door.*) The Committee is here, Mr. Brown.

BROWN (*hurriedly to Margaret.*) You receive them. Hand them the design. I'll get Brown. (*He raises his voice.*) Come right in, gentlemen.

(*He goes off right, as the Committee enter the office. When they see Margaret, they stop in surprise.*)

MARGARET (*embarrassedly.*) Good afternoon. Mr. Brown will be right with you. (*They bow. Margaret holds out the design to them.*) This is my husband's design. He finished it to-day.

COMMITTEE. Ah! (*They crowd around to look at it*

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— *with enthusiasm.*) Perfect! Splendid! Couldn't be better! Exactly what we suggested.

MARGARET (*joyfully*). Then you accept it? Mr. Anthony will be so pleased!

MEMBER. Mr. Anthony?

ANOTHER. Is he working here again?

THIRD. Did I understand you to say this was your husband's design?

MARGARET (*excitedly*). Yes! Entirely his! He's worked like a dog — (*Appalled.*) You don't mean to say — Mr. Brown never told you? (*They shake their heads in solemn surprise.*) Oh, the contemptible cad! I hate him!

BROWN (*appearing at right — mockingly*). Hate me, Margaret? Hate Brown? How superfluous! (*Oratorically.*) Gentlemen, I have been keeping a secret from you in order that you might be the more impressed when I revealed it. That design is entirely the inspiration of Mr. Dion Anthony's genius. I had nothing to do with it.

MARGARET (*contritely*). Oh, Billy! I'm sorry! Forgive me!

BROWN (*ignoring her, takes the plan from the Committee and begins unpinning it from the board — mockingly*). I can see by your faces you have approved this. You are delighted, aren't you? And why not, my dear sirs? Look at it, and look at you! Hahaha! It'll immortalize you, my good men! You'll be as death-defying a joke as any in

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Joe Miller! (*Then with a sudden complete change of tone – angrily.*) You damn fools! Can't you see this is an insult – a terrible, blasphemous insult! – that this embittered failure Anthony is hurling in the teeth of our success – an insult to you, to me, to you, Margaret – and to Almighty God! (*In a frenzy of fury.*) And if you are weak and cowardly enough to stand for it, I'm not!

(*He tears the plan into four pieces. The Committee stand aghast. Margaret runs forward.*)

MARGARET (*in a scream*). You coward! Dion! Dion! (*She picks up the plan and hugs it to her bosom.*)

BROWN (*with a sudden goatish caper*). I'll tell him you're here. (*He disappears, but reappears almost immediately in the mask of Dion. He is imposing a terrible discipline on himself to avoid dancing and laughing. He speaks suavely.*) Everything is all right – all for the best – you mustn't get excited! A little paste, Margaret! A little paste, gentlemen! And all will be well. Life is imperfect, Brothers! Men have their faults, Sister! But with a few drops of glue much may be done! A little dab of pasty resignation here and there – and even broken hearts may be repaired to do yeoman service! (*He has edged toward the door. They are all staring at him with petrified bewilderment. He puts his finger to his lips.*) Ssssh! This is Daddy's bedtime secret for to-day: Man is born broken. He

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lives by mending. The grace of God is glue!
(*With a quick prancing movement, he has opened the door, gone through, and closed it after him silently, shaking with suppressed laughter. He springs lightly to the side of the petrified Draughtsmen — in a whisper.*)
They will find him in the little room. Mr. William Brown is dead!

(*With light leaps he vanishes, his head thrown back, shaking with silent laughter. The sound of his feet leaping down the stairs, five at a time, can be heard. Then a pause of silence. The people in the two rooms stare. The Younger Draughtsman is the first to recover.*)

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN (*rushing into the next room, shouts in terrified tones*). Mr. Brown is dead!

COMMITTEE. He murdered him!

They all run into the little room off right. Margaret remains, stunned with horror. They return in a moment, carrying the mask of William Brown, two on each side, as if they were carrying a body by the legs and shoulders. They solemnly lay him down on the couch and stand looking down at him.

FIRST COMMITTEEMAN (*with a frightened awe*).
I can't believe he's gone.

SECOND COMMITTEEMAN (*in same tone*). I can

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almost hear him talking. (*As if impelled, he clears his throat and addresses the mask importantly.*) Mr. Brown — (*then stops short.*)

THIRD COMMITTEEMAN (*shrinking back*). No. Dead, all right! (*Then suddenly, hysterically angry and terrified.*) We must take steps at once to run Anthony to earth!

MARGARET (*with a heart-broken cry*). Dion's innocent!

YOUNGER DRAUGHTSMAN. I'll phone for the police, sir! (*He rushes to the phone.*)

(*Curtain*)

ACT FOUR

SCENE TWO

SCENE. *The same as Scene Two of Act Three – the library of William Brown's home. The mask of Dion stands on the table beneath the light, facing front.*

On his knees beside the table, facing front, stripped naked except for a white cloth around his loins, is Brown. The clothes he has torn off in his agony are scattered on the floor. His eyes, his arms, his whole body strain upward, his muscles writhe with his lips as they pray silently in their agonized supplication. Finally a voice seems torn out of him.

BROWN. Mercy, Compassionate Saviour of Man! Out of my depths I cry to you! Mercy on thy poor clod, thy clot of unhallowed earth, thy clay, the Great God Brown! Mercy, Saviour! *(He seems to wait for an answer – then leaping to his feet he puts out one hand to touch the mask like a frightened child reaching out for its nurse's hand – then with immediate mocking despair.)* Bah! I am sorry, little children, but your kingdom is empty. God has become disgusted and moved away to some far ecstatic star where life is a dancing flame! We must die without him. *(Then – addressing the mask – harshly.)* Together, my friend! You, too! Let Margaret suffer! Let the whole world suffer as I am suffering!

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(There is a sound of a door being pushed violently open, padding feet in slippers, and Cybel, wearing her mask, runs into the room. She stops short on seeing Brown and the mask, and stares from one to the other for a second in confusion. She is dressed in a black kimono robe and wears slippers over her bare feet. Her yellow hair hangs down in a great mane over her shoulders. She has grown stouter, has more of the deep objective calm of an idol.)

BROWN *(staring at her — fascinated — with great peace as if her presence comforted him)*. Cybel! I was coming to you! How did you know?

CYBEL *(takes off her mask and looks from Brown to the Dion mask, now with a great understanding)*. So that's why you never came to me again! You are Dion Brown!

BROWN *(bitterly)*. I am the remains of William Brown! *(He points to the mask of Dion.)* I am his murderer and his murdered!

CYBEL *(with a laugh of exasperated pity)*. Oh, why can't you ever learn to leave yourselves alone and leave me alone.

BROWN *(boyishly and naïvely)*. I am Billy.

CYBEL *(immediately, with a motherly solicitude)*. Then run, Billy, run! They are hunting for some one! They came to my place, hunting for a

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murderer, Dion! They must find a victim! They've got to quiet their fears, to cast out their devils, or they'll never sleep soundly again! They've got to absolve themselves by finding a guilty one! They've got to kill some one now, to live! You're naked! You must be Satan! Run, Billy, run! They'll come here! I ran here to warn – some one! So run away if you want to live!

BROWN (*like a sulky child*). I'm too tired. I don't want to.

CYBEL (*with motherly calm*). All right, you needn't, Billy. Don't sulk. (*As a noise comes from outside.*) Anyway, it's too late. I hear them in the garden now.

BROWN (*listening, puts out his hand and takes the mask of Dion – as he gains strength, mockingly*). Thanks for this one last favour, Dion! Listen! Your avengers! Standing on your grave in the garden! Hahaha! (*He puts on the mask and springs to the left and makes a gesture as if flinging French windows open. Gaily mocking.*) Welcome, dumb worshippers! I am your great God Brown! I have been advised to run from you but it is my almighty whim to dance into escape over your prostrate souls!

(*Shouts from the garden and a volley of shots. Brown staggers back and falls on the floor by the couch, mortally wounded.*)

CYBEL (*runs to his side, lifts him on to the couch and*

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takes off the mask of Dion). You can't take this to bed with you. You've got to go to sleep alone.

(She places the mask of Dion back on its stand under the light and puts on her own, just as, after a banging of doors, crashing of glass, trampling of feet, a Squad of Police with drawn revolvers, led by a grizzly, brutal-faced Captain, run into the room. They are followed by Margaret, still distractedly clutching the pieces of the plan to her breast.)

CAPTAIN *(pointing to the mask of Dion — triumphantly)*. Got him! He's dead!

MARGARET *(throws herself on her knees, takes the mask and kisses it — heart-brokenly)*. Dion! Dion!

(Her face hidden in her arms, the mask in her hands above her bowed head, she remains, sobbing with deep, silent grief.)

CAPTAIN *(noticing Cybel and Brown — startled)*. Hey! Look at this! What're you doin' here? Who's he?

CYBEL. You ought to know. You croaked him!

CAPTAIN *(with a defensive snarl — hastily)*. It was Anthony! I saw his mug! This feller's an accomplice, I bet yuh! Serves him right! Who is he? Friend o' yours! Crook! What's his name? Tell me or I'll fix yuh!

CYBEL. Billy.

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CAPTAIN. Billy what?

CYBEL. I don't know. He's dying. (*Then suddenly.*) Leave me alone with him and maybe I'll get him to squeal it.

CAPTAIN. Yuh better! I got to have a clean report. I'll give yuh a couple o' minutes.

(*He motions to the Policemen, who follow him off left. Cybel takes off her mask and sits down by Brown's head. He makes an effort to raise himself toward her and she helps him, throwing her kimono over his bare body, drawing his head on to her shoulder.*)

BROWN (*snuggling against her — gratefully*). The earth is warm.

CYBEL (*soothingly, looking before her like an idol*). Ssshh! Go to sleep, Billy.

BROWN. Yes, Mother. (*Then explainingly.*) It was dark and I couldn't see where I was going and they all picked on me.

CYBEL. I know. You're tired.

BROWN. And when I wake up . . . ?

CYBEL. The sun will be rising again.

BROWN. To judge the living and the dead! (*Frightenedly.*) I don't want justice. I want love.

CYBEL. There is only love.

BROWN. Thank you, Mother. (*Then feebly.*)

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I'm getting sleepy. What's the prayer you taught me — Our Father — ?

CYBEL (*with calm exultance*). Our Father Who Art!

BROWN (*taking her tone — exultantly*). Who art! Who art! (*Suddenly — with ecstasy*.) I know! I have found Him! I hear Him speak! "Blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh!" Only he that has wept can laugh! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of Earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God! (*He dies.*)

CYBEL (*gets up and arranges his body on the couch. She bends down and kisses him gently — she straightens up and looks into space — with a profound pain*). Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always for ever again! — Spring again! — life again! — summer and autumn and death and peace again! — (*with agonized sorrow*) — but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again — spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! — (*then with agonized exultance*) — bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again! (*She stands like an idol of Earth, her eyes staring out over the world.*)

MARGARET (*lifting her head adoringly to the mask — triumphant tenderness mingled with her grief*). My lover! My husband! My boy! (*She kisses the*

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mask.) Good-bye. Thank you for happiness! And you're not dead, sweetheart! You can never die till my heart dies! You will live for ever! You will sleep under my heart! I will feel you stirring in your sleep, for ever under my heart! (*She kisses the mask again. There is a pause.*)

CAPTAIN (*comes just into sight at left and speaks front without looking at them – gruffly*). Well, what's his name?

CYBEL. Man!

CAPTAIN (*taking a grimy notebook and an inch-long pencil from his pocket*). How d'yuh spell it?

(*Curtain*)

EPILOGUE

SCENE. *Four years later.*

The same spot on the same pier as in Prologue on another moonlight night in June. The sound of the waves and of distant dance music.

Margaret and her three sons appear from the right. The eldest is now eighteen. All are dressed in the height of correct school elegance. They are all tall, athletic, strong and handsome-looking. They loom up around the slight figure of their mother like protecting giants, giving her a strange aspect of lonely, detached, small femininity. She wears her mask of the proud, indulgent Mother. She has grown appreciably older. Her hair is now a beautiful grey. There is about her manner and voice the sad but contented feeling of one who knows her life-purpose well accomplished but is at the same time a bit empty and comfortless with the finality of it. She is wrapped in a grey cloak.

ELDEST. Doesn't Bee look beautiful to-night, Mother?

NEXT. Don't you think Mabel's the best dancer in there, Mother?

YOUNGEST. Aw, Alice has them both beat, hasn't she, Mother?

MARGARET (*with a sad little laugh*). Each of you is right. (*Then, with strange finality.*) Good-bye, boys.

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BOYS (*surprised*). Good-bye.

MARGARET. It was here on a night just like this your father first – proposed to me. Did you ever know that?

BOYS (*embarrassedly*). No.

MARGARET (*yearningly*). But the nights now are so much colder than they used to be. Think of it, I went in for moonlight-bathing in June when I was a girl. It was so warm and beautiful in those days. I remember the Junes when I was carrying you boys – (*A pause. They fidget uneasily. She asks pleadingly.*) Promise me faithfully never to forget your father!

BOYS (*uncomfortably*). Yes, Mother.

MARGARET (*forcing a joking tone*). But you mustn't waste June on an old woman like me! Go in and dance. (*As they hesitate dutifully.*) Go on. I really want to be alone – with my Junes.

BOYS (*unable to conceal their eagerness*). Yes, Mother. (*They go away.*)

MARGARET (*slowly removes her mask, laying it on the bench, and stares up at the moon with a wistful, resigned sweetness*). So long ago! And yet I'm still the same Margaret. It's only our lives that grow old. We *are* where centuries only count as seconds and after a thousand lives our eyes begin to open – (*she looks around her with a rapt smile*) – and the moon rests in the sea! I want to feel the moon at peace in the sea! I want Dion to leave

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the sky for me! I want him to sleep in the tides of my heart! (*She slowly takes from under her cloak, from her bosom, as if from her heart, the mask of Dion as it was at the last and holds it before her face.*) My lover! My husband! My boy! You can never die till my heart dies! You will live for ever! You are sleeping under my heart! I feel you stirring in your sleep, for ever under my heart. (*She kisses him on the lips with a timeless kiss.*)

(Curtain)

The Fountain

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Characters

IBNU ASWAD, *a Moorish chieftain*

JUAN PONCE DE LEON

PEDRO, *his servant*

MARIA DE CORDOVA

LUIS DE ALVAREDO

YUSEF, *a Moorish minstrel*

DIEGO MENENDEZ, *a Franciscan*

VICENTE DE CORDOVA, *Maria's husband*

ALONZO DE OVIEDO

MANUEL DE CASTILLO

CRISTOVAL DE MENDOZA

} *nobles*

A SOLDIER

FRIAR QUESADA, *a Franciscan*

BEATRIZ DE CORDOVA, *daughter of Maria and
Vicente*

NANO, *an Indian chief*

A CHIEF OF THE INDIANS IN FLORIDA

A MEDICINE MAN

A FIGURE

A POET OF CATHAY

AN OLD INDIAN WOMAN OF THE BAHAMAS

A DOMINICAN MONK

FATHER SUPERIOR OF THE DOMINICANS IN CUBA

JUAN, *nephew of Juan Ponce de Leon*

*Nobles, Monks, Soldiers, Sailors, Captive Indians
of Porto Rico, Indians in Florida.*

TIME: Late Fifteenth and early Sixteenth Centuries.

Scenes

PART ONE

- SCENE I: Courtyard of the house of Ibnu Aswad, Granada, Spain – the night of the Moorish capitulation, 1492.
- SCENE II: Columbus's flagship on the last day of his second voyage, 1493.

PART TWO

- SCENE III: Courtyard of the Government House, Porto Rico, an afternoon twenty years or more later.
- SCENE IV: Cabinet of Bishop Menendez in the Government House – an evening three months later.
- SCENE V: A prisoner's cell in the Government House – the same time.
- SCENE VI: Same as Scene Three – immediately follows Scene Five.

PART THREE

- SCENE VII: A strip of beach on the Florida coast – a night four months later.
- SCENE VIII: The same – noon the following day.
- SCENE IX: A clearing in the forest – that night.
- SCENE X: The same, some hours later.
- SCENE XI: Courtyard of a Dominican monastery in Cuba – several months later.

The Fountain

SCENE ONE

SCENE. *Courtyard of Ibnu Aswad's palace in Granada.*

The section forms a right triangle, its apex at the rear, right. In the left, centre, a massive porte-cochère opens on the street. On the right, a door leading into the house itself. In the centre of the courtyard, a large splendid fountain of green marble with human and animal figures in gilt bronze. The peristyle of the gallery running around the court is supported by slender columns of polished marble, partly gilded. The interspaces above the horseshoe arches springing from the columns are filled with arabesques, texts from the Koran, red, blue and gold in colour. Above are the latticed windows of the women's apartments. Over the house-top a sky with stars can be seen. It is early night.

As the curtain rises, the court is empty and there is silence except for the splash of the fountain. Then a loud, imperious knocking, as of someone pounding with the hilt of a sword, is heard from the porte-cochère. Ibnu Aswad enters from the right. He is an elderly, noble-looking Moor, the lower part of his face covered by a long, white beard. His expression is one of great pride borne down by sorrow and humiliation. He goes out through the porte-cochère,

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and returns ushering in Juan Ponce de Leon and his servant, Pedro. Juan is a tall, handsome Spanish noble of thirty-one, dressed in full uniform. His countenance is haughty, full of a romantic adventurousness and courage; yet he gives the impression of disciplined ability, of a confident self-mastery—a romantic dreamer governed by the ambitious thinker in him. Pedro is a dull-looking young fellow.

JUAN (*as they enter*) (*to Aswad*). Your pardon, Sir Moor.

ASWAD (*haughtily*). You are quartered here? (*Juan bows in affirmation.*) Welcome then, since it is the will of Allah that you should conquer.

JUAN (*graciously*). I am no conqueror here. I am a stranger grateful for hospitality.

ASWAD (*unbending a bit*). You are kind. I have seen you in action on the field. You are brave. Defeat loses its bitterness when the foe is noble. (*Moodily and bitterly—staring at the fountain.*) The waters of the fountain fall—but ever they rise again, Sir Spaniard. Such is the decree of destiny. (*With fervour.*) Blessed be Allah who exalteth and debaseth the kings of the earth, according to his divine will, in whose fulfilment consists eternal justice. (*Fiercely and defiantly.*) Whosoever the victor, there is no conqueror but Allah!

JUAN (*stiffening—coldly*). Your fortitude does you honour. (*By way of dismissing the subject—*

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abruptly.) I am expecting friends. Will that disturb your household? If so —

ASWAD (*coldly*). My house is your house. It is decreed. (*He bows with stately grace and goes out, right.*)

JUAN (*makes a movement as if to detain him — then shrugs his shoulders*). What can I do for him? (*Ironically repeating Ibnu's inflexion.*) It is decreed by Spain if not by Allah. (*Seeing Pedro lolling against the wall, drowsily staring at the fountain — amused.*) Lazy lout! Does the fountain cause you, too, to dream? (*In a tone of command.*) Bring the wine. They will be here soon.

PEDRO. Yes, sir. (*He goes. Juan paces back and forth, humming to himself. Pedro returns and approaches his master cautiously — in a mysterious whisper.*) A lady, sir.

JUAN (*frowning*). Is she alone? (*Pedro nods, Juan smiles cynically.*) Surely you have mistaken her calling. Tell her I am not here.

(*As Pedro turns to go, Maria de Cordova appears in the arch of the porte-cochère. A heavy black veil is thrown over her face.*)

MARIA (*her voice forced and trembling*). Juan!

JUAN (*immediately the gallant cavalier, makes a motion for Pedro to leave, and bows low — mockery in his voice*). Beautiful lady, you do me an unmerited honour.

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MARIA (*wearily*). Spare me your mockery, Juan.

(She throws back her veil. She is a striking-looking woman of thirty-eight or forty, but discontent and sorrow have marked her age clearly on her face.)

JUAN (*astonished*). Maria! (*Then with genuine alarm.*) In God's name!

MARIA (*her voice breaking*). Juan, I had to come.

JUAN (*sternly*). Your husband is my brother in arms. To-night — here — he is to be among my guests. I feel that every word we speak now degrades me in my honour.

MARIA (*in a tone of great grief*). You are cruel! I had to speak with you alone. This is my one chance. I leave the Court to-morrow.

JUAN (*with evident relief*). Ah.

MARIA (*stares at him with a pitiful appeal. He avoids her eyes*). Oh, what a fool I am — (*with a half-sob, as if the confession were wrung from her*) — to love you, Juan!

(She makes a movement toward him, but he steps back, aloof and cold.)

JUAN (*frowning*). That word — we have never uttered it before. You have always been — my friend. (*After a pause, with deep earnestness.*) Why must you ruin our rare friendship for a word that every minstrel mouths? (*Then with irritation.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

Love, love, love we chatter everlastingly. We pretend love alone is why we live! Bah! Life is nobler than the weak lies of poets – or it's nothing!

MARIA (*wounded and indignant*). If you had had to fight for love as you have fought for glory! –

JUAN (*struck by the pain in her tone, kneels and kisses her hand – remorsefully*). Forgive me! I would die rather than bring sorrow to a heart as kind as yours. Keep me for ever in that heart, I beg – but as a friend – as it has always been.

MARIA (*with a gasp of pain*). Ah! (*Taking her hand from his – with a deep sigh.*) God give you knowledge of the heart!

JUAN (*rises – plainly endeavouring to change the subject*). You are leaving the Court?

MARIA. The Queen has granted my wish to retire to Cordova. (*Passionately.*) I'm sick of the Court! I long for simple things! I pray to become worthy again of that pure love of God I knew as a girl. I must seek peace in Him! (*After a pause.*) Granada is ours. The Moors are driven from Spain. The wars are over. What will you do now, Juan?

JUAN. Peace means stagnation – a slack ease of cavaliers and songs and faded roses. I must go on.

MARIA. Where will you go?

JUAN (*smiles half-whimsically at an idea*). Perhaps with the Genoese, Christopher Columbus,

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when he sails to find the western passage to Cathay.

MARIA (*disturbed*). But they say he is mad.

JUAN (*seriously now*). Mad or not, he dreams of glory. I have heard he plans to conquer for Spain that immense realm of the Great Khan which Marco Polo saw.

MARIA. What! Abandon your career at Court now when your exploits have brought you in such favour? No one would ruin himself so senselessly save in despair! (*Jealously.*) It must be from love you are fleeing! (*Fiercely mocking.*) Is a woman avenging women? Tell me her name!

JUAN (*with a mocking laugh*). Love, love, and always love! Can no other motive exist for you? God pity women!

MARIA (*after a pause – sadly*). God pity me – because pity is what you offer me. (*As Juan seems about to protest wearily.*) Don't deny it, Juan. It sneers at me in your pretended scorn of love – You wish to comfort my humiliation! Am I a fool? Have you not loved others? I could name ten –

JUAN. Maria!

MARIA. Do you imagine I haven't guessed the truth? Those others had youth – while I – And my love seems to you – pitiable!

JUAN (*kneeling and taking her hand – with passionate earnestness*). No, dear friend, no! I

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swear to you! (*After a pause.*) What you call loves — they were merely moods — dreams of a night or two — lustful adventures — gestures of vanity, perhaps — but I have never loved. Spain is the mistress to whom I give my heart, Spain and my own ambitions, which are Spain's. Now do you understand?

MARIA (*sadly*). No, Juan. (*He rises.*) I understand that I am growing old — that love has passed for me — and that I suffer in my loneliness. Perhaps if God had granted me a child — But His justice punishes. He has seen my secret sin. I have loved you, Juan, for years. But it was only in the last year when my heart, feeling youth die, grew desperate that I dared let you see. And now, farewell, until God's will be done in death. We must not meet again.

JUAN (*sternly*). No. (*Passionately.*) I wish to God you had not told me this!

MARIA (*gently*). If you are still my friend you will not wish it. It was my final penance — that you should know. And, having told you, I am free, for my heart is dead. There is only my soul left that knows the love of God which blesses and does not torture. Farewell once more, Juan. (*He kneels and kisses her hand. She puts the other on his head as if blessing him.*) You are noble, the soul of courage, a man of men. You will go far, soldier of iron — and dreamer. God pity you if those two selves should ever clash! You shall

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have all my prayers for your success – but I shall add, Dear Saviour, let him know tenderness to recompense him when his hard youth dies! (*She turns quickly and goes out.*)

JUAN (*looks after her in melancholy thought for a while – then sighs deeply and shrugs his shoulders*). Time tarnishes even the pure, difficult things with common weakness.

(*Luis de Alvarado enters through the porte-cochère. He is a dissipated-looking noble, a few years older than Juan. His face is homely but extremely fetching in its nobility, its expression of mocking fun and raillery. He is dressed carelessly, is slightly drunk.*)

LUIS (*mockingly*). Lover of glory, beloved of women, hail! (*He comes to the startled Juan as voices are heard from the porte-cochère – in a hurried, cautioning whisper.*) The devil, Juan! Have you lost your wits – or has she? I recognized her – and Vicente was only ten paces behind. (*Then again mockingly.*) Discretion, my stainless knight, discretion!

JUAN (*sternly*). Stop! You wrong her and me. (*Sounds of a loud, angry dispute are heard from without.*) What is that brawling?

LUIS. My Moor. (*Explaining hurriedly to Juan.*) A fellow poet – a minstrel of their common folk. We found him running amuck about the streets

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declaiming to the stars that their king, Abdallah, had sold his soul to hell when he surrendered. (*With admiration.*) By God, Juan, how he cursed! Oh, he's a precious songster, and as poet to poet I collared him and dragged him with us. Our friend, Diego, would have cut his throat for the Church's glory had I not interfered.

JUAN (*smiling*). As madman for madman, eh? But why bring him here to howl?

LUIS. He has a lute. It is my whim he should sing some verses (*With an amused grin.*) The dog speaks only Arabic. If he is wily, he will chant such curses on our heads as will blight that fountain dry – and no one of us but me will understand. (*With great glee.*) It will be sport, Juan! (*The clamour from outside grows more violent.*) By God, Diego will murder my minstrel – after all my pains. (*Starts to hurry out – stops in the entrance.*) Remember, Juan. Vicente may have recognized – the lady.

JUAN (*nods, frowning*). The devil take all women! (*Luis goes out. Pedro enters, carrying two large baskets full of bottles and sets them down, rear.*) Drink and forget sad nonsense. Bring out cushions. We will sit beside the fountain.

(*Pedro goes into the house, right. Luis re-enters, holding Yusef by the arm – a wizened old Moor dressed in the clothes of the common people, but wearing the turban signifying that he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. His*

THE FOUNTAIN

deep-set eyes smoulder with hatred, but physically he is so exhausted as to seem resigned to his fate. They are followed by Diego Menendez, a Franciscan monk, about the same age as Juan and Luis. He has a pale, long face, the thin, cruel mouth, the cold, self-obsessed eyes of the fanatic. Just now he is full of helpless fury and indignation. Accompanying him is Vicente de Cordova, a grey-haired, stern, soldierly noble of forty-five. Following them are the three nobles, Oviedo, Castillo and Mendoza. They are the type of adventurous cavaliers of the day — cruel, courageous to recklessness, practically uneducated — knights of the true Cross, ignorant of and despising every first principle of real Christianity — yet carrying the whole off with a picturesque air.)

MENENDEZ (*angrily*). I protest to you, Juan. It is heresy to suffer this dog's presence when we offer thanks to God for victory.

JUAN (*stares at the Moor interestedly for a moment — then carelessly*). I see no desecration, Diego — if he will sing, not howl. (*Turning to Vicente, scrutinizing his face keenly — carelessly.*) What do you say, Vicente?

VICENTE (*gives him a dark look of suspicion — coldly and meaningly*). I say nothing — now.

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN. Ah! (*He and Luis exchange a look.*)

OVIEDO. Well, I say let him remain. We may have sport with him.

CASTILLO (*with a cruel smile*). Perhaps with a sword-point we can persuade him to sing where the townsfolk hid their gold.

MENDOZA. Your words are inspired, Manuel!

LUIS (*scornfully*). Materialists! You would sack heaven and melt the moon for silver. Juan, where is your wine?

(*Pedro appears, bringing cushions and goblets for each. He uncorks the bottles and pours their goblets full. Scorning a goblet, Luis snatches a bottle from him and drinks from that.*)

JUAN (*keeping a wary eye on Vicente*). Let us drink. (*Takes a goblet from Pedro.*) To our most Gracious Sovereigns and to Spain! (*He drinks.*)

MENENDEZ. And to the Church! (*Angrily.*) But I will not drink until that infidel is moved apart!

VICENTE. I agree.

JUAN (*impatiently*). Let the Moor go, Luis — since Diego takes himself so seriously.

VICENTE (*coldly resentful*). And I? (*Juan is about to reply irritably when Luis breaks in hurriedly.*)

LUIS. Shhh! I'll sing a song for you. (*Releasing the Moor and pointing to the rear.*) Go, brother bard, and take your ease.

THE FOUNTAIN

(The Moor goes to the right, rear, and squats down in the shadow by the wall. Luis sings.)

Love is a flower
For ever blooming.
Life is a fountain
For ever leaping
Upward to catch the golden sunlight,
Striving to reach the azure heaven;
Failing, falling,
Ever returning
To kiss the earth that the flower may live.

(They all applaud as he finishes.)

JUAN. Charming, Sir Poet – but a lie. *(Mockingly.)* Love, and love, and always love! The devil seize your flower! Do fountains flow only to nourish flowers that bloom a day and die?

LUIS. Roar, lion! You will not wake my dream that life is love!

JUAN. Listen to him, Diego! We know his only love is his old mother; and yet, to judge from his songs, you would think him a greater philanderer than – than –

VICENTE *(interrupting sneeringly)*. Than you, Don Juan?

JUAN *(turning on him – coldly)*. Gossip gives many a false name – but gossip only deludes old women.

THE FOUNTAIN

VICENTE (*growing pale*). Do you intend that insult?

(Their hands go to the hilt of their swords. The three nobles quicken to excited interest. Luis leaps between them.)

LUIS. For God's sake! Is either of you a Moor? (*Raises his bottle.*) Let us drink again to Spain!

OVIEDO. And to the next war!

CASTILLO. May it be soon!

MENDOZA. With a world to sack! Sing us a song of that, Luis!

LUIS. I am too thirsty. But come, I was forgetting our infidel. Let me use persuasion –

(He goes back to the Moor, and can be heard talking to him in Arabic.)

JUAN. We were speaking of wars to come. With whom?

OVIEDO. With anyone!

JUAN. But guess. I think it will be in lands beyond strange seas – Cipango and Cathay – the cities of gold that Marco Polo saw.

OVIEDO. But who will lead us there?

JUAN. Why, Christopher Columbus. (*They all laugh.*)

CASTILLO. That Genoese mongrel! – to lead Spaniards!

THE FOUNTAIN

MENDOZA. He's mad. He claims the earth is round — like an egg! (*They all laugh.*)

JUAN (*impressively*). I saw him to-day. He was riding his flea-bitten mule as if he were a Cæsar in a triumph. His eyes were full of golden cities.

CASTILLO. Bah, Juan, you romance! The man's an idiot!

LUIS (*coming back*). The more fool you to think so! He will yet find for Spain the Western Passage to the East.

CASTILLO. Or fall off the world's edge! I will wager you would not go with him for all the gold in Indies!

LUIS. You would lose!

JUAN. I'm planning to go. (*All are astonished.*) But not on his first voyage. Before I pledge my sword I must have proof that it can serve Spain's glory. There is no profit in staking life for dreams.

LUIS. There is no profit in anything but that! You're from the East, Moor. Tell us of the Great Khan, of Cipango and Cathay and Cambuluc, of golden roofs and emerald-studded lintels to the doors. Your people must have heard these wonders.

MENDOZA. Yes, let him sing of treasure. (*But the Moor remains silent.*)

LUIS. Wait, I'll talk to him. (*He goes back and speaks to the Moor in Arabic. The latter replies.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

MENENDEZ (*furiously*). This is all treasonable. The dog had broken the peace. The punishment is death.

JUAN (*mockingly*). Let him sing of treasure, Diego. Even the Church loves gold.

LUIS (*coming back — exultantly*). He consents, Juan — because I am a colleague. He will sing of treasure in the East — a tale told to his father by some wandering poet who came from Cathay with a caravan. (*All except the outraged Diego and the sullen, preoccupied Vicente quicken to interested attention. The Moor strikes a few notes on his lute.*) Hush!

(The Moor begins a crooning chant of verses, accompanying himself on the lute. At first they are all held by its strange rhythm, then they begin to betray impatience.)

OVIEDO. By God, our wolf turns into a sick shepherd.

LUIS. Hush!

CASTILLO (*impatiently*). What does he sing?

LUIS (*enrapt — vaguely*). Hush, hush.

MENENDEZ (*rising to his feet as the Moor's recitative abruptly ends — harshly*). This is the service in a devil's mass!

LUIS (*passes his hand across his eyes, then stares into the fountain dreamily*). He sang of treasure —

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but strange to your longing. There is in some far country of the East – Cathay, Cipango, who knows – a spot that Nature has set apart from men and blessed with peace. It is a sacred grove where all things live in the old harmony they knew before man came. Beauty resides there and is articulate. Each sound is music, and every sight a vision. The trees bear golden fruit. And in the centre of the grove, there is a fountain – beautiful beyond human dreams, in whose rainbows all of life is mirrored. In that fountain's waters, young maidens play and sing and tend it everlastingly, for very joy in being one with it. This is the Fountain of Youth, he said. The wise men of that far-off land have known it many ages. They make it their last pilgrimage when sick with years and weary of their lives. Here they drink, and the years drop from them like a worn-out robe. Body and mind know youth again, and these young men, who had been old, leap up and join the handmaids' dance. Then they go back to life, but with hearts purified, and the old discords trouble them no more, but they are holy and the folk revere them. (*With a sigh.*) That's his tale, my friends – but he added it is hard to find that fountain. Only to the chosen does it reveal itself.

MENENDEZ (*furiously*). Idolatry!

OVIEDO. Is this his treasure! By God, he mocks us!

LUIS. Fools! Beauty is lost on you. Your souls

THE FOUNTAIN

clink like coppers. (*Menendez slinks back step by step toward the Moor. Luis grabs a bottle.*) Come, let us drink! We'll all to Cathay with Don Christopher. You can burrow for dung there – but I will search for this fountain.

JUAN (*drinking – a bit tipsily*). Drink and forget sad nonsense! The devil! His song beguiled me until you tricked it into that old woman's mumble. Youth! Is youth a treasure? Then are we all – except Vicente – priceless rich; and yet, God's blood, one has but to look to see how poor we are!

LUIS. Poor in spirit! I understand you, Juan.

JUAN. Fountain of youth, God help us, with love to boot! I wish he'd sung instead of the armies and power of the Great Khan! (*Then half-aside to Luis.*) The tale is always told to the wrong person. There was one here not long ago who would have given pearls for drops from that same fountain!

VICENTE (*who has crept vengefully toward Juan in time to hear these last words – with cold fury*). A moment ago you taunted me with age – and now you dare – (*He slaps Juan across the face. They draw their swords.*)

LUIS (*trying to intervene*). For God's sake, friends!

OVIEDO (*with excited interest*). A duel!

(*The others echo this. Suddenly there is a harsh shriek from the rear. Menendez*

THE FOUNTAIN

appears from the shadow, dagger in hand, a look of fanatical triumph on his face. Forgetting the duel, the others stand appalled.)

MENENDEZ (*sheathing the dagger*). I have slain the dog. It was high time.

LUIS. Miserable bigot!

(Raging, he tries to throw himself at the monk, but Juan grasps him and forces him down on a cushion. He breaks down, weeping.)

MENENDEZ (*coldly scornful*). What! A soldier of Christ weep for an infidel!

JUAN (*sternly*). Be still, Diego! (*Then frowning — curtly, in a tone of dismissal which silences all protest.*) Our revelling is under an ill star. There is blood upon it. Good-night. (*Turning to Vicente.*) Until to-morrow.

(Vicente bows and goes, accompanied by Menendez. The young nobles troop out behind, disputing noisily about the coming duel.)

JUAN (*comes over and puts his hand on Luis' shoulder — in a mocking, but comforting tone*). Come, Luis. Your brother romancer is dead. Tears will not help him. Perhaps even now he drinks of that Fountain of Youth in Dreamland — if he is not in hell.

THE FOUNTAIN

LUIS (*raising his head*). Juan, why do you always sneer at beauty – while your heart calls you liar?

JUAN (*frowning*). I have Spain in my heart – and my ambition. All else is weakness. (*Changing his tone – carelessly.*) Well, you were right. Vicente recognized – and so, a duel. I'll prick him in the thigh and send him home to bed. She will nurse and love him then – and hate me for a murderer. Thus, all works out for the best in this fair world! But – a rare thing dies – and I'm sad, Luis. (*Shaking himself and taking a goblet of wine.*) Come, forget sad nonsense. We will drink to voyaging with Don Christopher – and to the battles before those golden cities of Cathay!

LUIS (*recovering his spirits – grabbing a bottle*). Lucifer fire your cities! I drink to my fountain!

JUAN. Your health, Sir Lying Poet!

LUIS. And yours, Sir Glory-Glutton!

(They laugh, clink goblet and bottle, and drink as

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE TWO

SCENE. *About a year later — Columbus's flagship on the last day of his second voyage. The section of the vessel shown reveals the main deck amidships, the mainmast, the mainsail with its Maltese Cross, the two higher decks of the poop, the lateen sail on the mizzenmast, etc. Wooden stairs on the starboard, near the bulwark, are the means of getting from one deck to another.*

It is the time just preceding the dawn. The ship is sailing steadily on a calm sea. There is a large lantern at the centre of the main deck, another low down in the rigging on the port side, another over the cross which hangs over the stern from the high poop. The ship is crowded with people. On the main deck are the nobles. They are dressed in rich uniforms, in armour. Most of them are asleep, lying sprawled on the deck, wrapped in their cloaks — or huddled in hunched attitudes, their backs propped against the mast or the bulwarks. But one small group has apparently been awake all night. They are sitting cross-legged, throwing dice by the light of the lantern. The faces of the gamesters are haggard and drawn, their eyes feverish. Prominent among them are Oviedo, Castillo, Mendoza and Luis.

On the first deck of the poop, the monks, all Franciscans, are lying asleep. Here, also, are

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four of the converted Indians Columbus is bringing back. They are dressed in incongruous costumes, half savage and half civilized. They are huddled in the right corner, not asleep, but frozen in a helpless apathy.

On the highest deck Juan is seen standing by the pilot who tends the helm.

LUIS (*excitedly*). Double or quits!

OVEDO. Done. (*They play. Luis loses.*)

LUIS. I am ruined again! (*With a comical groan of despair.*) Fortune is a damned mercenary wench. She scorns the poor. (*Takes up the dice to throw.*) Once more!

OVEDO (*grumblingly*). No. You owe me more than you can pay.

LUIS. I will soon be rich as Cræsus. Don Columbus says we will sight land to-day – the Indies, Isles of Spice, Cipango, Cathay, who knows what? I will stake my future wealth against yours. Come! One more cast for anything you wish.

OVEDO (*dryly*). For gold – gold I can see and touch.

LUIS (*disgustedly*). The devil! I must borrow from Juan then. (*He gets to his feet.*)

OVEDO. He will not thank you to wake him on a beggar's errand.

LUIS. Do you imagine he sleeps with his Pro-

THE FOUNTAIN

mised Land so near? He is astern on the Admiral's poop keeping a watch of his own – for fear the lookout will miss Cathay!

CASTILLO. Juan is over-eager. He will make the Genoese jealous.

MENDOZA. Has already. It is plain Columbus slights him.

OVIEDO. From policy. He knows Juan is in disgrace at Court since the duel. Our admiral trims his sails to the wind.

CASTILLO. Juan paid dearly for Vicente's wound – a pin-prick that hardly drew blood.

MENDOZA. It was the scandal.

LUIS (*indignantly*). All false – the malice of envious tongues! Vicente himself apologized to Juan. As for the lady, when I was home in Cordova I saw her with Vicente. You could not find a more married pair. It was even rumoured they were to have a child – (*Juan has come down from the Admiral's poop, passed through the sleeping monks and now appears by the light of the lamp in the rigging at the head of the stairs to the main deck. Luis breaks off suddenly.*) Is that you, Juan? Come, be a brother. This son of luck (*he indicates Oviedo*) has won everything but my skin.

JUAN (*with a laugh*). Then stake the Fountain of Youth which you will find – to-morrow! Sold by the cask it should make you the richest man in Spain. (*The nobles laugh.*)

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LUIS (*with real aversion*). What trader's scheming – from you! (*Then jokingly*.) Take care! When the pox of old age is on you will come begging to me! (*Then rattling the dice*.) But come, loan me gold for a last cast of revenge. (*Then with a sudden idea*.) And you throw for me. My star is behind a cloud.

OVIEDO. Not fair. Juan always wins.

JUAN (*frowning*). This is no time for gaming.

LUIS (*insistently*). Just once, Juan.

JUAN (*consenting unwillingly*). Only once. The stakes are yours. Let the cast be an augury for me.

(*He takes gold from his purse. He and Oviedo play. Oviedo wins and there is a murmur of astonishment.*)

OVIEDO (*exultantly*). I win. The first time I have ever beat you, Juan.

JUAN (*getting up*). A poor omen. (*Then mockingly*.) But here on the under side of earth these signs must run by opposites.

MENDOZA (*half frightenedly*). Can we be hanging head down and not know it?

CASTILLO. Bah! The Genoese made his first voyage safely. We cannot fall off, it seems.

OVIEDO. Columbus may be a liar.

MENDOZA (*savagely*). A low-born braggart! He displayed his origin in the hoggish demands he

THE FOUNTAIN

made on the crown. What could the Sovereigns be thinking of – to make this foreign upstart an Admiral and a Viceroy?

JUAN (*sternly rebuking*). It is not for us to question. (*He pauses – then adds.*) His enterprise has served Spain well. He is our commander. That is enough to know.

(*He turns his back on them and walks to the port side where he stands by the rigging looking out to sea. The nobles look after him for a moment in an abashed silence.*)

CASTILLO (*mockingly*). You are a perfect Christian, Juan – to love your enemy.

OVIEDO (*yawns*). Put out the lantern. Let us sleep. The dawn will wake us.

(*Mendoza puts out the lantern. All except Luis wrap themselves in their robes and lie down on the deck. Luis comes over to Juan.*)

LUIS (*scornfully*). Look at those clods. They would snore through the Last Judgment. (*Then as Juan is silent.*) What are you dreaming of – Cathay and glory?

JUAN. No. (*Then suddenly.*) When I came down I heard Vicente's name – and mention of a child. What were you saying?

LUIS. Gossip of Cordova. My mother told me

THE FOUNTAIN

Maria was having masses said that she might bear an heir – and the rumour was her prayers were answered.

JUAN (*with deep sincerity*). God grant it. She will be happy then. (*With an ironical laugh.*) Did I not tell you that night our duel would reconcile them? (*Soberly.*) But I pay. Well, what matter the cost if Maria wins happiness?

LUIS (*reassuringly*). One exploit and the Court will be at your feet again.

JUAN (*shaking his head*). We will be far from Spain – out of sight and mind. Columbus will be king here, and he and I are by nature antagonistic.

(There is a noise from the higher deck of the poop. A tall figure can be made out coming up on deck there from the companionway. He moves back until the light from the lantern above the cross reveals him. It is Columbus. He is in full uniform but wears no hat on his long, white hair. A commanding figure of noble presence, the face full of the ardent, fixed enthusiasm of the religious devotee.)

LUIS (*pulling Juan back into the shadow*). Speak the devil's name! (*They stand, watching and listening, but hidden from the poop.*)

COLUMBUS (*to the helmsman*). Have you held the course?

THE FOUNTAIN

HELMSMAN. South-west by west, sir.

COLUMBUS (*peering about him*). Will the dawn never come? (*He comes to the edge of the deck and calls down where the monks are – in a low voice.*) Father Menendez. Are you awake?

MENENDEZ (*gets up quickly from among the sleeping monks*). I am here, your Excellency. (*He mounts to the deck above and stands waiting respectfully.*)

COLUMBUS (*begins in a blunt, perfunctory tone*). Toscanelli's map must be in error. We should have sighted land before. (*A pause. He paces back and forth.*) The sun will soon be up. It leaps from the darkness in these parts. (*A pause, then with evident irritation.*) A weary voyage, Father! The spirit of these nobles is perverse. They look on this voyage as an escapade in search of easy riches, not as a crusade for the glory of God.

MENENDEZ (*curtly*). They are brave. Many of them have proven their ability in war – Juan Ponce de Leon, for one.

COLUMBUS (*resentfully*). A bravo! A duellist!

LUIS (*in an indignant whisper*). The devil seize him!

JUAN (*grimly*). Another aftermath of that cursed duel!

MENENDEZ (*shortly*). You are unjust, Excellency.

COLUMBUS. Oh, I admit he possesses all the attributes but the one which alone gives them virtue – an humble piety. On this great quest

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there is no place for egotists who seek only selfish ends. We must all feel ourselves unworthy servants of God's Holy Will. (*Then breaking off — abruptly.*) But I did not call you to speak of him. (*After a pause — despondently.*) My soul is overburdened, Father.

MENENDEZ (*dryly*). You wish to confess?

COLUMBUS (*surprised*). Confess? (*Then in a loud, ringing tone.*) Yes, to all men! Their mouths are full of lies against me. They say the demands I made for my share of discovery prove my low-minded avarice. Knaves! What can they know of my heart? Is it for myself I desire wealth? No! But as a chosen instrument of God, Who led me to His Indies, I need the power that wealth can give. I need it for God's glory, not my own! (*More and more exaltedly.*) I have a dream, Father! Listen! From my earliest youth I have hated the infidel. I fought on the ships of Genoa against their corsairs and as I saw my city's commerce with the East cut off by their ruthlessness, I prayed for one glorious last Crusade that would reclaim the Mediterranean for Christendom and, most fervent prayer of all, regain from profanation the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus! (*He crosses himself. Menendez also. Then he hurries on exultantly.*) And now an answer is granted! With my share of the wealth from Indies, from Cipango and Cathay, I will fit out an army — the Last Crusade! I have promised it to His Holiness, the Pope —

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fifty thousand men, four thousand horse, with a like force to follow after five years. I shall reconquer the Blessed Tomb of Christ for the True Faith! And to that sacred end I devote my life and all my wealth and power! (*He stands looking up to heaven with the rapt gaze of a devotee.*)

MENENDEZ (*dryly*). Such a pious ambition does you honour.

JUAN (*unable to restrain himself, calls mockingly*). The Crusades are dead – and the wealth of the East is still unwon.

COLUMBUS (*stung – indignantly*). Who dares – ?

JUAN (*proudly*). A noble of Spain who thinks of her greatness while you dream of Genoa and Rome; a soldier of the present, not the ghost of a Crusader! (*Then with exasperated mockery.*) God's blood, have all our leaders become half monk? There was a time for that when we fought the Moor, but now a new era of world empire dawns for Spain. By living in the past you will consecrate her future to fanaticism!

COLUMBUS (*angrily*). Insolent!

JUAN (*vehemently*). No. I respect you, Columbus – but I have my vision, too. Spain can become the mistress of the world, greater than ancient Rome, if she can find leaders who will weld conquest to her, who will dare to govern with tolerance. (*He laughs a bitter, mocking laugh.*) But what a time to speak! Look at the men of this fleet –

THE FOUNTAIN

now when the East dawns for them! I agree with you, Don Christopher — a weary voyage! Adventurers lusting for loot to be had by a murder or two; nobles of Spain dreaming greedy visions of wealth to be theirs by birthright; monks itching for the rack to torture useful subjects of the Crown into slaves of the Church! And for leader to have you, Don Christopher — you who will pillage to resurrect the Crusades! Looters of the land, one and all! There is not one who will see it as an end to build upon! We will loot and loot and, weakened by looting, be easy prey for stronger looters. God pity this land until all looters perish from the earth! (*While he is speaking it has grown perceptibly lighter.*)

COLUMBUS (*furiously*). Who are you? Stand forth! You dare not!

JUAN (*jumps up to the lower level of the poop and advances to the ladder to the Admiral's poop — proudly*). It is I — Juan Ponce de Leon! Why should I not dare? Do you want men under your command — or lackeys?

COLUMBUS (*striving to control his rage*). Silence!

(*A wailing cry of "Land Ho" comes from the mainmast head. Immediately the same cry can be heard coming over the water from the other vessels of the fleet. Instantly all is confusion. Every one jumps to their feet, half awake, peering about bewilderedly. The four Indians*

THE FOUNTAIN

sense what has happened and hang over the bulwark, staring over the seas with intense longing. A crowd of half-dressed sailors and rabble pour up from below decks. There is a babble of excited shouts. Columbus looks upward to see where the lookout is pointing, then turns to the horizon off the starboard bow. Juan leaps to the ratlines.)

THE CROWD. Land! Land! Where? I heard the call. He shouted land! Is it Cathay? Where is he pointing? Look where the Admiral looks. When the sun comes — (*Suddenly the ship is flooded by shafts of golden crimson light. They all cry.*) The sun!

JUAN (*pointing*). There! I see! In a haze of gold and purple — Greater Spain!

ALL (*crowd to the starboard side and to the front. The Indians are pushed away, jostled, thrown aside contemptuously with imprecations until they are hunched disconsolately in the background in dumb terror and bewilderment*). Where? I see! Where? There! There! Cathay. Cipango. Is it Cathay? Where are the golden cities? Where are the golden roofs? Is it Cipango? The Indies! The Isles of Spice! Marco Polo's land!

(They all crowd, pushing and elbowing each other, craning their necks, the eyes of all, rabble, soldiers, nobles, priests,

THE FOUNTAIN

*straining with the same greedy longing,
the lust to loot.)*

JUAN (*exultantly*). Cathay or Cipango or the Isles of Spice, what difference? It shall be Greater Spain! (*The crowd cheers vociferously.*)

COLUMBUS (*trying to quell the tumult*). Silence, I say! (*Fixing his eyes sternly on Juan with undisguised hostility — rebukingly.*) The earth is God's! Give thanks to Him! Kneel, I command you! Raise the cross!

(The monks raise their cross. They kneel, but the nobles and soldiers hesitate waiting for Juan as if they saw in him their true commander.)

JUAN (*leaps down from the rigging, drawing his sword — with fierce exultance*). This is a cross too, a soldier's cross — the cross of Spain!

(He sticks his sword-point into the deck before him. He kneels before it. All the nobles and soldiers do likewise with a great flourish of gestures and excited shouts. They are all kneeling with their quivering cross swords, hilts rising above their heads.)

COLUMBUS (*from his knees — looking up to heaven devoutly*). Te Deum!

(The monks begin to chant. All join in, their

THE FOUNTAIN

pent-up excitement giving to the hymn a hectic, nervous quality. Juan does not sing but stares at the land on the distant horizon.)

(The Curtain Falls)

SCENE THREE

SCENE. *Twenty years or so later — the courtyard of the Governor's palace, Porto Rico. Flowers, shrubs, a coco-palm, orange and banana trees. A large, handsome fountain closely resembling that of Scene One, is at centre. Two marble benches are at front and rear of fountain. A narrow paved walk encircles the fountain basin, with other walks leading from it to the different entrances. Doors to the interior of the house are at left and right. The main entrance to the courtyard, opening on the road, is at rear centre.*

It is in the late, languid hours of a torrid afternoon. The courtyard bakes in the heat, the fountain shimmering in the heat-waves.

Juan is seated on the stone bench in front of the basin. He is dressed in the full uniform of his authority as Governor. His face is aged, lined, drawn. His hair and beard are grey. His expression and attitude are full of great weariness. His eyes stare straight before him blankly in a disillusioned dream. The lines about his compressed lips are bitter.

Luis enters from the left, rear. He is dressed in the robe of a Dominican monk. His face shows the years but it has achieved a calm, peaceful expression as if he were at last in harmony with himself. He comes down to Juan and puts a hand on his shoulder.

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*starts — then greets his friend with a smile*). Ah, it's you, reverend Father. (*He accents this last mockingly.*)

LUIS (*good-naturedly*). Yes, illustrious Governor. (*He sits beside Juan — with a laugh.*) You are like a sulky child, Juan. Come, is it not time, after five years, you forgave me for being a Dominican?

JUAN (*bitterly*). My friend deserting to my enemy!

LUIS (*protestingly*). Come, come! (*Then after a pause, with a sigh.*) You have always had the dream of Cathay. What had I? What had I done with life? — an aimless, posing rake, neither poet nor soldier, without place nor peace! I had no meaning even to myself until God awakened me to His Holy Will. Now I live in truth. You must renounce in order to possess.

JUAN. The world would be stale indeed if that were true! (*After a pause — irritably.*) I fight the battles; you monks steal the spoils! I seek to construct; you bind my hands and destroy!

LUIS (*remonstrating*). You speak of Diego and his kind.

JUAN (*frowning*). Whether you convert by clemency or he by cruelty, the result is the same. All this baptizing of Indians, this cramming the cross down their throats has proved a ruinous error. It crushes their spirits and weakens their bodies. They become burdens for Spain instead of valuable servitors.

THE FOUNTAIN

LUIS. Your army crushed them first —

JUAN. They had to be conquered, but there I would have stopped. (*Then irritably.*) God's blood, here we are arguing about this same issue — for the thousandth time! It is too late. Talk is useless. (*With a weary sigh.*) We do what we must — and sand covers our bodies and our deeds. (*With a smile.*) And the afternoon is too hot, besides. Tell me some news. Will the fleet from Spain make port to-day?

LUIS. Just now I saw them rounding the point under full sail. They should anchor soon.

(They are interrupted by the noise of several people approaching from outside. Oviedo and Friar Quesada, a Franciscan, enter, followed by the Indian chief, Nano, who is guarded by two soldiers with drawn swords. Quesada is a thin young monk with the sallow, gaunt face and burning eyes of a fanatic. Oviedo is aged but gives no evidence of having changed in character. Nano is a tall, powerfully built Indian of fifty or so. Although loaded down with chains, he carries himself erect with an air of aloof, stoical dignity. He wears a head-dress of feathers. His face and body are painted, ornaments are about his neck. He is naked except for a loin-cloth and moccasins.)

THE FOUNTAIN

QUESADA (*fiercely and arrogantly*). I demand justice on this dog!

JUAN (*freezing – proudly*). Demand?

QUESADA (*with ill-concealed hatred but awed by Juan's manner*). Pardon my zeal in the service of God, Your Excellency. I ask justice. (*Then defiantly.*) But it is not the Church's custom to be a suppliant.

JUAN. So much the worse – (*Sternly.*) What is this Indian's crime?

QUESADA. His tribe will not pay the tithes – and he himself has dared to refuse baptism!

JUAN (*coldly*). I'll question him. (*Then as Quesada hesitates, raging inwardly – sternly.*) You may go.

QUESADA (*controlling his rage, bows*). Yes, Your Excellency. (*He goes.*)

JUAN (*to Oviedo with a certain contempt*). You also have a charge against this Indian?

OVIEDO (*angrily*). A plea for justice! These dogs will not pay their taxes. And we who own estates cannot get them to work except by force, which you have arbitrarily curtailed. Then why not punish them by leasing their labour to us until their debt's wiped out? Thus the Government will be paid, and we will have workers for our mines and fields.

JUAN (*disgustedly*). Your brain is not inventive,

THE FOUNTAIN

Oviedo! You are well aware that is the same blunder which failed on Espaniola. It means slavery. It defeats its purpose. The Indians die under the lash – and your labour dies with them. (*Contemptuously.*) Do you think I am Columbus that you ask this folly of me?

OVIEDO (*haughtily*). You refuse? (*He goes to the rear where he turns – threateningly.*) Take care, Juan! There will come a day of reckoning – when Diego returns from Spain. (*He goes out.*)

JUAN (*frowning*). Diego? What do you mean?

OVIEDO (*with a revengeful smile*). Nothing. Adios, Don Juan. (*He goes out.*)

JUAN (*with a bitter laugh*). There you have it! Bah! What use – ? (*He suddenly seems to see Nano for the first time. They stare at each other.*) I was forgetting you. Are you not Nano, chief of the last tribe I conquered? (*As the Indian is silent – imperiously.*) Speak!

NANO. The devils were with you. Our villages were burned. Women and children were killed – my wives, my children!

JUAN (*frowning*). Contrary to my command. But, again, what use? The dead are dead. It is too late. (*After a pause – with a sort of weary self-mockery.*) Have you ever heard of Cathay – Cipango? Do you know of vast countries to the west – many peoples – great villages with high walls – much gold?

THE FOUNTAIN

NANO. I have heard.

JUAN (*surprised – eagerly*). Ah! Where are they? (*Nano points west.*)

LUIS (*amusedly*). Where the fountain of youth of my drunken days is located – in dreamland!

JUAN (*with a certain seriousness*). Do you know, they say there is a similar fountain legend among these tribes. (*Then to Nano with a mocking smile.*) My friend here is growing impatient waiting for immortality in heaven and would rather gain it here on earth –

LUIS. Juan!

JUAN. So tell him, O Mighty Chief, if there is not over there – a fountain – a spring – in which old men bathe or drink and become young warriors again?

NANO (*to both their surprise*). The tale is told. Not here. In my home – a land that never ends. Our priests told the tale. I was young then. I was captured in war and brought here. I was adopted. I have never returned.

JUAN (*lost in thought*). So? Where is this land, your home? (*Nano points as before.*) Where Cathay is? And the fountain – the spring – is there?

NANO (*after a moment's hesitation*). Yes. My people call it the Spring of Life.

LUIS (*whimsically*). A pretty title, indeed. (*Sceptically.*) But none can find it, I suppose?

NANO. Those the Gods love can find it.

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*scornfully*). Aha, that old trick of poets – evasion of facts! (*Turning to Luis.*) Do you remember the Moor that night in Granada? “Only to the chosen.” Here is the echo! Bah! What jugglery! (*Then thoughtfully.*) But it is strange. Where there is so much smoke, there must be a spark of fire. The Moor traced his myth back to the East – Cathay – and now we discover it again – still in Cathay – circling the world – (*Then, as if ashamed of himself for taking it so seriously – carelessly.*) At all events, it is added evidence that Cathay is near. (*The boom of a cannon comes from the harbour.*)

LUIS. The fleet has anchored. Diego will soon be here. If you can give this Indian into my keeping I will attempt his conversion.

JUAN (*impatiently*). Until his case is investigated, he must go to prison. You may see him there. (*To Nano, sternly.*) If it is proven you have encouraged rebellion against Spain, you will be hung. Against any other charge I will try to save you. (*Summoning the soldiers.*) Guard. (*They salute and lead Nano out, left. Juan paces up and down in frowning thought.*) Diego! Did you hear Oviedo threaten me with him? What mischief will he bring from Spain this time, I wonder? The cursed spider! His intriguing will destroy all my work here – (*With impotent anger.*) And the fight is hopeless. His weapons are whispers. A man of honour stands disarmed. (*Intensely.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

Would to God this fleet brought me the King's patent to discover new lands! I would sail to-morrow for Cathay – or for the moon!

LUIS (*firmly*). Fight your battle here! This is your land. You conquered it.

JUAN. Columbus discovered it; and I still feel his influence, like a black fog, stifling me!

LUIS (*mollifyingly*). He is dead. Forgive. He suffered too much injustice to be just.

JUAN. How can my pride forgive? For years I held his solitary outposts; I suffered wounds and fevers; I fought the Indians for him while he went sailing for the Garden of Eden, the mines of Solomon, his Bible-crazed chimeras! He knew my honour would not permit my conspiring against him as others did. So he ignored my services and deliberately condemned me to obscurity! Never one mention of my name in his reports to Spain! It is only since his downfall – (*Breaking off.*) But this, too, is an old story. (*Then with sudden exasperation.*) Why should I not sail to find Cathay? He failed in that – but I would succeed! I am no visionary chasing rainbows. (*Desperately.*) I tell you I loathe this place! I loathe my petty authority! By God, I could sink all Porto Rico under the sea for one glimpse of Cathay!

LUIS (*alarmed*). Juan!

JUAN (*after a pause – ironically*). Well, do not

THE FOUNTAIN

fear that I will leave your precious island. The patent will never come – and if it did, there is a flaw – (*Despondently, with a great weariness.*) It is too late. Cathay is too far. I am too weary. I have fought small things so long that I am small. My spirit has rusted in chains for twenty years. Now it tends to accept them – to gain peace. (*With passionate yearning.*) If I could only feel again my old fire, my energy of heart and mind – ! If I could be once more the man who fought before Granada – ! But the fire smoulders. It merely warms my will to dream of the past. It no longer catches flame in deeds. (*With a desolate smile of self-pity.*) I begin to dread – another failure. I am too old to find Cathay.

(*Menendez appears in rear in time to hear this last. He is dressed in a Bishop's robes. He looks his years, but his expression of rabid fanaticism has changed to one, not less cruel, of the crafty schemer made complacent by a successful career, the oily intriguer of Church politics. He hesitates with a suspicious, inquisitive glance from one to the other – then advances with a forced air of joviality.*) What is this I hear? Too old? Tut-tut! This is heresy, Juan. (*The two turn, startled. Juan stares at him resentfully. Menendez exchanges a cold bow of condescension with Luis, then comes to Juan with outstretched hands, smiling oilily.*) Have you no greeting for me, old friend?

JUAN (*takes his hands perfunctorily – then sar-*

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castically). Who would expect you unattended – like any eavesdropping monk?

MENENDEZ (*unruffled*). My eagerness to see you. I have great news. I often spoke to the King about you. He now holds you in the highest esteem, and as a proof of his favour I bring you – (*Then with a sly smile.*) But, on second thought, I should not say, I bring you. That is reserved for a worthier hand!

JUAN (*impatiently*). I dislike mysteries.

MENENDEZ (*provokingly*). I will give you this hint out of respect for the old age you were lamenting! Prepare to welcome youth – and a prize you have sought for all your life in the Indies – a gift more welcome to you than wine was to Luis before he repented! (*With this parting gibe, he turns away.*) Pardon me if I leave you. I must make preparations – for this event. (*He bows mockingly and goes off right.*)

JUAN (*angrily*). Schemer! (*He paces up and down.*)

LUIS (*after pondering a moment – suddenly*). I have it! It must be your patent to explore! He has obtained it from the King – because he wishes to get rid of you here! You stand in his way – your policy of clemency. He wants to be dictator to introduce torture and slavery! Yet he is afraid to fight you openly, so what craftier scheme than to send you away contented, grateful for a gift, bribed without knowing it?

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JUAN (*resentfully*). Then I will fool the fox! There is no compulsion in such a patent. (*Then confused.*) But—it would be my highest hope come true—too late! Too late! I am too old. (*With an attempt at a railing tone.*) God's blood, I need to find Cathay—if your Fountain of Youth is there!

LUIS. I hear a crowd coming. I must go. It adds to their spleen to find us together. (*He presses Juan's hand.*) Whatever comes, be firm, old friend.

(*He goes out left. The murmur of the crowd increases. Juan sinks on the bench before the fountain, oblivious to it, lost in gloomy thought. Beatriz de Cordova appears, attended by her duenna and a crowd of richly dressed nobles. She is a beautiful young girl of eighteen or so, the personification of youthful vitality, charm and grace. The nobles point out Juan to her. She dismisses them, motioning for them to be quiet—then comes in and approaches Juan, keeping the fountain between them. She holds a sealed document in her hand. Finally she calls in a trembling, eager voice.*)

BEATRIZ. Don Juan!

(*Juan whirls on his bench and stares through the fountain at her. He utters a stunned exclamation as if he saw a ghost. His*

THE FOUNTAIN

eyes are held fascinated by her beauty. Then suddenly she laughs – a gay, liquid, clear note – and coming quickly around confronts him.) It is I, Don Juan.

JUAN (*stares at her still fascinated – then, reminded, springs to his feet and bows low with his old mocking gallantry*). Pardon! I am bewitched! I thought you were the spirit of the fountain. (*Then more mockingly.*) Beautiful lady, you do me unmerited honour!

BEATRIZ (*hurt and confused by his tone*). You don't know me? Why, I'm Beatriz. (*As he bows but shows no recognition.*) Has Bishop Menendez not told you – ?

JUAN (*suspiciously*). Nothing of you, my lady.

BEATRIZ. I am Beatriz de Cordova –

JUAN (*guessing – amazed, stares at her – a pause, slowly*). Maria's child! – you!

BEATRIZ (*letting it all pour forth regardless*). She died a year ago – and – I am your ward now. It was her last wish. My father was dead. There was no near relative whom she would trust. I asked the King to send me here to you. He bade me wait until the Bishop could escort me. He made me the bearer of this gift for you – your dearest wish, he said. (*She gives him the document.*)

JUAN (*unrolls it – a pause as he stares at it dully, then bitterly*). The patent – to find Cathay!

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BEATRIZ. Yes! And you can find it where the others failed, I know! You were my dear mother's ideal of Spanish chivalry, of a true knight of the Cross! That was her prophecy, that you would be the first to reach Cathay!

JUAN. She spoke of the man she knew. (*Staring at her fascinatedly – eagerly.*) She sends me you – and you are youth! Is it in mockery?

BEATRIZ (*suddenly*). Oh, Don Juan, I recall something she said I must remember when we should meet. "Bring him tenderness," she said. "That will repay the debt I owe him for saving me for you." She said these words were secrets to tell you alone. What did she mean, Don Juan?

JUAN (*deeply moved*). Tenderness? Do you bring me that, Beatriz? (*Then as if recalling himself.*) No, do not – for it means weakness. Bring me the past instead. Give me back – the man your mother knew.

BEATRIZ (*who has been scrutinizing him without paying attention to his words*). You are older than I dreamed, Don Juan.

JUAN (*wounded – with harsh violence*). No tenderness there! Youth! A cuirass of shining steel! A glittering sword! Laughter above the battle! (*Then seeing her look of frightened astonishment at his wild words, he controls himself and adds with a melancholy bitterness.*) It was so long ago, Beatriz – that night in Granada – a dimly-remembered

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dream — (*Then with a sudden return of his mockingly gallant manner.*) Forgive me. I have become a savage lost to manners. (*He kneels and kisses her hand with all his old-time gallantry.*) Welcome, dear ward, to Porto Rico!

(*She looks down at his bowed head, blushing with pleasure and naïve embarrassment, as*

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE FOUR

SCENE. *Three months later — Menendez' official study in the palace — a large, high-ceilinged, bare room with a heavy table at centre. The colour scheme is dark and gloomy, the atmosphere that of a rigid, narrow ecclesiasticism. In one corner is an altar with high candles burning before it. Heavy hangings shut out the light from the lofty, arched windows. An enormous crucifix hangs on the wall in rear. The room is like an exaggerated monk's cell, but it possesses a sombre power over the imagination by the force of its concentration. There is a main entrance at rear, centre, and a smaller side door at left, hidden by curtains.*

It is early evening. Menendez is seated at the table. He is frowningly impatient, listening and waiting for some one. There is the sound of approaching footsteps. Menendez turns eagerly in his chair. Quesada enters through the hangings on the left. His face is ominous and set. He wears a sword and pistols over his robe which is tucked up over high riding boots and spurs. He is covered with dust, and has evidently been riding hard. He bows respectfully to Menendez.

MENENDEZ. I had begun to think you would never come. (*Then with anxiety.*) What news?

QUESADA. The meeting is being held. They have gathered in the fort outside the town.

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MENENDEZ. Good! It is moving according to my plan, then.

QUESADA. They all agree that Don Juan must resign his patent.

MENENDEZ. Unless he sails to find Cathay at once?

QUESADA. Yes. They are all mad for the gold (*with a sneer*) over there, the report of which I have had rumoured about, as you directed.

MENENDEZ. Good. Then we shall be rid of Juan and all the discontented spirits on the island at one stroke!

QUESADA (*excitedly*). But they also demand that first the Indian, Nano, must be burned at the stake. They believe he has bewitched the Governor. They know of Don Juan's secret interviews with him.

MENENDEZ (*angrily*). Who told them?

QUESADA (*after a moment's hesitation - defiantly*). I did.

MENENDEZ (*angrily*). Fool!

QUESADA (*alarmed - humbly*). But the dog still refuses baptism.

MENENDEZ (*sternly*). Is this a time to consider one Indian? Idiot! You know as well as I that my intention has been to attack Juan on one issue, and only one - his failure to sail for Cathay now that he has the King's patent. What have all the Nanos, hung or unhung, to do with that?

THE FOUNTAIN

QUESADA. Much! If Don Juan were not bewitched by Nano's spells, he would have sailed long since.

MENENDEZ. And you told the rabble that? God pardon you! Was it any part of my orders that you should play upon the mob's lust for blood? I have worked for a peaceable revolt that would awaken Juan to his weakness and shame him into leaving. You have dared to evoke a madness which might easily sweep away all recognized authority. Quick! What was the rabble's mood when you left? (*Quesada avoids his eyes. Menendez pounds the table.*) Answer me!

QUESADA (*evasively*). They had been drinking —

MENENDEZ (*furiously, a note of alarm creeping in*). Ah!

QUESADA (*now thoroughly cowed*). They were clamouring to march on the palace. Don Oviedo was trying to restrain them —

MENENDEZ (*fiercely — with bitter scorn*). You cursed blunderer! No, I am the dolt for having trusted you!

QUESADA (*kneeling — cowed*). Forgive me, Your Grace!

MENENDEZ. Your action was treachery to me! And I shall punish you! When this expedition sails for that golden fable, Cathay, you shall go

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with it. Then blunder all you like! (*He rises and strides to the window at rear.*)

QUESADA (*humbly*). I humbly accept my penance.

MENENDEZ (*bitterly*). Behold the first fruits of your excessive piety! (*He points.*) The southern horizon is aflame!

QUESADA (*rising*). They must have set fire to the Indian villages.

MENENDEZ. Blood and fire! Your merry dance begins well! (*He lets the curtains fall back.*) Only Juan can control them now – if he would only promise them to sail at once – but no, he is too proud. He will fight armed rebellion to the last – and we will all go down in the same ruin!

QUESADA (*scornfully*). He is not the man he was – since Nano bewitched him.

MENENDEZ (*disgustedly*). Bah! You fool! (*Then intently.*) Yet there is truth in what you say. He has grown weak – between Luis' influence and the girl's meddling – (*Abruptly.*) Come! There is still a chance. Summon Don Juan to me at once! (*This last in a shout of impatience.*)

JUAN (*from outside, rear, mockingly*). There is no need for messengers.

(*He enters. In the three months he has aged greatly. His hair and beard have grown perceptibly white. Beneath the bitter, mocking mask there is an expres-*

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sion of deep, hidden conflict and suffering on his face as if he were at war with himself.)

MENENDEZ (*startled, afraid of what Juan may have overheard*). You heard — ?

JUAN (*scornfully*). Only what you shouted. Am I a monk to listen at keyholes? (*This with a glance at Quesada.*) But I know your intrigues. This meeting of yapping curs — you see, I have heard the rumour — you would have me sail at their bidding, and thus you would be free to rule this island in God's Holy Name! Is it not so?

MENENDEZ (*controlling his anger*). You have lost your senses. You will not realize that things have reached a crisis! The government has slipped through your fingers while you played at being a loving father —

JUAN (*stung — fiercely*). It's a lie! (*Controlling himself.*) I tell you again, Diego, I will sail at my pleasure, not yours.

MENENDEZ (*persuasively*). You have kept repeating that — and meanwhile your apathy has ruined us. Your soldiers and sailors are in open mutiny. The mob has risen. (*Urgently.*) Juan, do you want rebellion to overwhelm us? You promised them Cathay —

JUAN (*proudly*). It was you who promised them in my name, you mean, to make certain you would be rid of me!

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MENENDEZ (*tauntingly — noting Juan's reactions craftily*). I promised because I thought you were still Juan Ponce de Leon. But you are not. You have become merely a slave to a girl's sentimental whims! You are too feeble to govern here and too weak for Cathay. (*Juan's hand goes to his sword. Menendez continues cuttingly.*) Then for the sake of Spain, resign your office and surrender your patent for discovery to some one with the youth and courage to dare!

JUAN (*infuriated, half drawing his sword*). Take care, Diego! Your cloth cannot condone such insults!

MENENDEZ (*in a softened, oily tone*). Forgive me, Juan. I insult you for your own sake! Push on to your greatest victory! Do not wait here in a stupor for inglorious defeat!

JUAN (*shaken*). I shall sail — but first I must know — know for a certainty, beyond all doubt — exactly where — (*He stops abruptly.*)

MENENDEZ (*inquisitively*). What?

JUAN (*suspiciously*). Nothing.

QUESADA (*who has been listening with feverish interest — points to Juan accusingly*). He has gone to Nano every day. Look at his eyes! He is bewitched! (*Juan starts guiltily but tries to ignore him contemptuously.*)

MENENDEZ. Be still, Quesada! (*He looks at Juan.*) These interviews are mysterious, Juan.

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JUAN (*quickly — half turning away and averting his eyes — with forced carelessness*). I need accurate information for my voyage that only Nano can give me. That is why I have delayed.

MENENDEZ (*looking at him sharply*). So? I had thought it might be affection for Beatriz that held you.

JUAN (*vehemently*). No!

MENENDEZ (*keenly*). Why are you so vehement? It would be natural enough. You have lived alone. To find a daughter in your declining years —

JUAN (*pale with rage and agony*). Daughter? How could she look upon me — ?

MENENDEZ (*soothingly but with a taunting intent*). She used to regard you as her hero, her great commander. She must wonder now at this old man's weakness in you.

JUAN (*frenziedly*). Do you dare taunt me in her name? I *will* sail, I say! I will sail the very first day after I discover — (*Then distractedly, shaken.*) Enough, Diego! I shall do what I wish and when it pleases me!

(*He rushes out rear as if furies were hounding him. Menendez looks after him, a sneering smile of satisfaction gradually coming over his face as if something were proven to him.*)

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MENENDEZ (*half to himself, half to Quesada*). I should have guessed it before. Yet, who would have thought – He is bewitched, certainly.

QUESADA (*eagerly*). Yes!

MENENDEZ (*dryly*). But you are blaming the wrong witch. The guilty one is sinless. (*Quesada puzzles over this paradox with open eyes. Menendez ponders for a moment, then he turns to Quesada.*) Bring the Lady Beatriz.

QUESADA. Yes, Your Grace. (*He bows and hurries out, left. Menendez sits thoughtfully, evidently planning out his campaign. A moment later Beatriz enters. She bows respectfully.*)

BEATRIZ (*reservedly*). You wish to see me, Your Grace?

MENENDEZ (*nods and motions her to a chair. He scrutinizes her face carefully for a moment, then begins in a playful, ironical tone*). Beauty did not leave a stone on stone of ancient Troy. Are you another Helen, Beatriz?

BEATRIZ (*confused*). I – don't understand.

MENENDEZ (*coldly and brusquely*). Not understand that rebellion is seething in Porto Rico? – a rebellion that will deal destruction to us all!

BEATRIZ (*bewildered*). Rebellion? (*Then spirit-edly.*) Who would dare rebel against Don Juan?

MENENDEZ (*belittlingly*). Juan is powerless. His own soldiers have taken the lead against him. He is facing ruin! Do you understand? I wish I had

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words of fire to brand it on your brain! For I tell you on my conscience, as God's minister, you are the one responsible!

BEATRIZ (*stunned*). I? I? You are jesting! (*Then with haughty resentment.*) I harm Don Juan, who is my second father!

MENENDEZ (*seeming to grow more icy under her anger*). Who has done most in influencing him to softness and lax discipline —

BEATRIZ (*indignantly*). You mean because I have pitied the suffering of the Indians — ?

MENENDEZ (*dryly*). Let us judge your pity by its results. These heathen no longer fear. They defy our Holy Faith. They sneer at baptism. These Indians shirk their labour. And because Don Juan spends his time with you, he has forgotten not only his duty to govern but his oath to seek Cathay. The soldiers and sailors have waited too long in idleness. Now they revere him no longer as a daring general who will lead them to glory but despise him for a dissembler, delaying because he has lost the courage for action! And so they have conspired. Those are the facts. Will you deny your influence is deep at the root of them? (*Beatriz is too overwhelmed by the ruthlessness of his attack to reply. He pushes his advantage.*) And can you deny that a great change has come over Don Juan since your arrival? You cannot have helped but notice this!

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BEATRIZ. He has seemed – to become despondent at times.

MENENDEZ (*vehemently*). Spiritless! Infirm! His thoughts wander like a senile old man's! I believe his mind is failing him!

BEATRIZ (*horrified*). No! No!

MENENDEZ. You must face the truth! (*Sternly*.) When you take a life's ambition from a man like Juan, the man withers away. You have made him forget Cathay. Why? Why have you not urged him to go – for his own sake? When you brought out the patent, you dreamed of him as he dreams of himself – a conqueror and hero!

BEATRIZ (*hesitatingly*). Father Luis told me we must keep him here – or else his good work would be undone –

MENENDEZ. This uprising will undo it in an hour! (*Then soothingly*.) Father Luis is a good man – but blind. You are a girl – and inexperienced – Come. (*He pauses, watching her keenly, then takes her hand, and leading her to the window, pulls back the curtain.*) Look!

BEATRIZ (*with a shudder of horror*). Ah!

MENENDEZ. Now do you believe in the rebellion – in Juan's danger?

BEATRIZ (*horrified*). Fire!

MENENDEZ. And murder! In the Indian villages. See what your pity for them has done! And it will not stop there. That is only the first

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spark of revolution. They'll march here! (*Impressively.*) Beatriz, you can save Don Juan. He loves you – as his daughter. Urge him to sail at once! Rouse the hero in him! Give him back his sanity! He is my old friend. I implore you for his sake, Beatriz!

BEATRIZ (*bewilderedly*). Yes – yes – but give me time to think – to pray for guidance –

(*She kneels before the altar.*)

MENENDEZ (*impatiently*). There is no time!

(*There is a noise of hurrying steps and Oviedo enters. He is booted, spurred, covered with dust, his face betraying anxiety and alarm.*)

OVIEDO (*without stopping to see who is there, bursts forth*). Diego! I tried to check them, but they have gone mad! They are marching on the town! Juan will be lost!

MENENDEZ (*to Beatriz who has turned around in terror*). You hear!

OVIEDO. The time has come to abandon that sick fool! We must openly lead this rebellion!

BEATRIZ (*springs to her feet and faces him – her eyes flashing*). Coward! (*He falls back, his hand on his sword, glaring at her.*)

MENENDEZ (*urgently*). Go, Beatriz!

(*She passes Oviedo with a scathing glance,*

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and goes out rear. Menendez turns to Oviedo with an ironical but worried smile.)

MENENDEZ. If she will but speak to Juan as she did to you, we may still win, my friend!

(The Curtain Falls)

SCENE FIVE

SCENE. *Nano's dungeon — a circular cavern, hollowed out by Nature and cut out by man in the solid rock under the Government house. The enclosed space is narrow but lofty, cylindrical in form. A cut-in flight of steps leads from the floor in rear to a trap-door above. The high wall glistens with moisture. A small bench is at right. A lantern stands on one of the lower steps. In the middle of the floor stands a soldier, thick-set, brutal-looking, his sleeves rolled up over his muscular arms. He is blowing with a bellows on a charcoal brazier, glowing red-hot, in which are thrust several irons. On the wall in the rear, his toes barely touching the floor, Nano hangs with his arms outstretched over his head, the wrists bound by chains to iron sockets in the rock. His head hangs on one side as if he were in a state of semi-consciousness. His body is thin and wasted.*

The trap-door is opened and a circular patch of grey light falls on the stairs. This is obscured as some one descends. It is Juan. He shuts the trap-door behind him and comes down. He stops when he is opposite Nano's head, and, leaning over, stares at the savage's face. The latter opens his eyes. His head stiffens proudly erect on his shoulders. He and Juan stare into each other's eyes. Juan drops his guiltily, turns away and descends to the floor, where the soldier is standing at attention.

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*harshly*). Has he spoken?

SOLDIER. Not one word, sir.

JUAN. Then you have not obeyed —

SOLDIER (*indicates the irons in the fire*). I have tried every trick I know — but he's made of iron.

JUAN (*looks up at Nano with intense hatred*). Dog! (*Then he turns to the soldier.*) Go and keep guard above.

SOLDIER. Yes, sir. (*He bends down to pick up the brazier.*)

JUAN (*harshly*). No.

SOLDIER (*with a glance at him — understandingly*). Yes, sir.

(*He goes up the stairs, opens the trap-door and disappears, letting it fall shut behind him. Juan sinks on the stone bench at right and stares up at Nano, who looks back at him with unflinching defiance. A pause.*)

JUAN (*his eyes now fixed dully on the floor — half-aloud to himself*). Diego did not lie. The storm is gathering. (*With bitter hopelessness.*) What matter? I could pray that it might be a deluge annihilating mankind — but for Beatriz. (*He groans, then raises his eyes again to Nano.*) Why do you look at me? I can never read your eyes. They see in another world. What are you? Flesh, but not our flesh. Earth. I come after — or before — but lost, blind in a world where my eyes deflect on

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surfaces. What values give you your loan of life? Answer! I must know the terms in which to make appeal! (*The savage is silent, motionless. A pause. Then Juan, as if suddenly reminded, jumps to his feet in a frenzy of impatience.*) Answer me, dog! I must find the will to act – or be dishonoured!

NANO (*solemnly – in a faint voice*). The Gods are angry.

JUAN (*with wild joy*). You speak! At last! Nano, why have you kept dumb while I implored – ?

NANO. The Gods have stopped your ears.

JUAN (*going on obsessed, regardless*). Juan Ponce de Leon – to torture a helpless captive! Why did you bring me to such shame? Why would you not answer my question?

NANO (*with contempt*). My tongue grew weary. For a moon I answered every day.

JUAN (*fiercely*). But you lied! Tell me the truth now! Where is the fountain?

NANO (*indifferently, shutting his eyes*). Only the Gods know.

JUAN. The same lie! You told me at first that men of your former tribe knew! You must know! This is your revenge – for the death of your wives and children! Must I swear to you again they were killed in spite of my strict orders? Come! Forget them! I will give you your choice of all your women on the island – your freedom – I will petition the King to honour you – give you back

THE FOUNTAIN

your lands — anything if you will answer me! (*Nano remains silent. Juan utters a furious cry and, rushing to the brazier, takes a red-hot coal with the tongs and holds it before the Indian's eyes.*) Dog! I will burn that scorn from your eyes! (*The Indian stares at the hot iron immovably. Juan lets it fall to the floor with a desperate groan of misery.*) Pardon! Forgiveness in Christ's name! It is you who torture me! Nano, I burn to hell! I love! (*He suddenly stops, chilled to despair by the implacable isolation in the savage's face. He throws himself down on the bench in an apathy. Finally he slowly draws his sword and speaks in a dead voice.*) Either you speak or you die. I swear it.

NANO (*with aloof contempt*). What is death?

JUAN (*dully*). I will die, too. Perhaps in the grave there is oblivion and peace. (*After a pause.*) You are a fool, Nano. If you would help me I could make you pilot of the fleet to guide us to your land. The fountain once found, you would be free. No harm should come to your people. Do you never long for your old home?

NANO (*who has been listening with quickened interest*). Home? To the land of flowers. My home of many warriors. (*After a pause.*) You will let me guide the great winged canoes — to my home?

JUAN (*eagerly*). Yes. (*In great suspense.*) Will you help me? Tell me! (*He has sprung to his feet.*)

NANO. Only the Gods — (*He checks himself abruptly.*)

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JUAN (*frenziedly*). Ah! (*He raises his sword as if to run the savage through.*)

NANO (*looking into Juan's eyes without noticing the threat*). The tongues of the white devils are false. How can I trust your word?

JUAN. I take my sacred oath! (*He raises his hand.*)

NANO. Your God is a God of lies.

JUAN (*wildly*). By your God then – since mine has forsaken me!

NANO (*lifts his head and murmurs some supplication, as if begging forgiveness – then looks at Juan with savage triumph*). I will guide you – but remember the way is long!

JUAN (*triumphantly*). At last! What does it matter how long or difficult! (*Raising his arms.*) Ah, God's blood, I already feel new life, the will to live! I can conquer now! (*A pounding of a sword-butt on the trap-door. Then it is flung open.*)

SOLDIER. Pardon, Excellency –

BEATRIZ' VOICE (*calls down*). Don Juan! Don Juan!

JUAN (*exultantly*). Her voice! A happy omen! (*He hurries up the stairs.*)

NANO (*again lifting his eyes to heaven – with religious fervour*). Great Spirit, forgive my lie. His blood shall atone!

(*The Curtain Falls*)

SCENE SIX

SCENE. *Same as Scene Three — Courtyard of the Governor's house — a stifling twilight. The sky is darkening with clouds.*

Beatriz' voice — from the left — calls down as at the end of preceding scene.

BEATRIZ. Don Juan! Don Juan!

(His voice is heard, "Beatriz." She enters, pale and agitated, runs to rear and looks for signs of the insurrection — then hurries back just in time to meet Juan, who enters, left. He is in a tense state of hectic excitement, his face ghastly pale, his obsessed eyes burning feverishly, his drawn sword still in his hand. She starts back from him, frightened by his appearance.)

JUAN *(in a strained, high-pitched tone)*. Was it the fountain called — or you, Beatriz? You, for you are the fountain! *(He takes her hand impetuously and kisses it.)*

BEATRIZ *(flurriedly)*. I came to warn you —

JUAN *(with a sharp glance)*. Warn? Then you have seen Diego? Bah! *(He makes a gesture of contempt with his sword as if brushing all revolutions aside.)* When the hour comes, I shall be strong. The will breathes in me again. Forget all else, Beatriz. Give me your thoughts! Have you been happy here with me?

THE FOUNTAIN

BEATRIZ (*not knowing what to say or do*). Yes – yes. (*Trying to return to her mission.*) But –

JUAN. You came as a benediction – that cursed me. (*Abruptly.*) Have you not noticed how much older I have grown?

BEATRIZ (*convinced he is out of his head – resolved to humour him – frightened but pityingly*). You can become young again.

JUAN (*exultantly*). I will! (*Then mysteriously.*) This is a strange world with many wonders still undiscovered.

BEATRIZ (*seeing a chance to bring in her point – quickly*). Then discover them. The search will make you young.

JUAN (*deeply and superstitiously impressed*). From your own lips! It is another blessed augury! (*Eagerly.*) But pretend I am young. What then?

BEATRIZ. Why then you would be happy.

JUAN (*intensely*). You promise – ? Have you never loved?

BEATRIZ (*bewildered*). Loved?

JUAN. Since you speak of happiness.

BEATRIZ. I loved my mother – my father – I love you, Don Juan.

JUAN (*avidly*). Ah, say that again! Those words are blood to my heart!

BEATRIZ (*earnestly*). I love you as I loved my father –

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*brusquely — wounded to the quick*). Has love never stolen into your dreams? You are no nun. Come, tell me the image of the one you dream of as a lover.

BEATRIZ (*resolved to pass this off jestingly*). It is a great secret. You insist? Well then, it is your double — (*Juan utters a cry of joy, bending toward her. She adds hastily.*) You as my mother described you in the wars before Granada.

JUAN (*bitterly*). When I had youth. But I loved only glory then. Did she not tell you that?

BEATRIZ. Why then — that is why she said, bring him tenderness.

JUAN (*sombrely*). You have fulfilled her wish — or was it her revenge? (*Then abruptly.*) And what if I should myself become that double? — the knight of Granada with your gift of tenderness — what then?

BEATRIZ (*frightened by his strangeness*). Ah, now, you are jesting, Don Juan. (*She forces a laugh.*)

JUAN (*passionately*). No, Beatriz! (*She instinctively shrinks away from him. He calms himself.*) No more now. I fear your laughter. First let the consummation — Then you will not laugh. You — (*Trying to read her mystified eyes — miserably uncertain.*) What will you do?

BEATRIZ (*controlling her timidity — softly persuasive*). You are ill, Don Juan. Will you listen to my cure for you?

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN. Yes.

BEATRIZ (*with energy*). Sail and find Cathay!

JUAN (*with a start, tormentedly*). You, too, condemn me! But I swear to you I have longed to go! I have hated my own cowardice! I have played the traitor to every dream, every great hope – But, Beatriz, when I go, I will leave my life behind with you. So – until I knew – I was afraid of losing what I have – (*Then with a quick change to something approaching triumphant decision.*) But that is past! My will has risen from the dead. It is decreed by your own lips. I shall sail at once!

BEATRIZ. Oh, I am glad!

JUAN (*sadly*). Glad I am leaving you?

BEATRIZ. No, I shall be sad and lonely. It is for your own welfare –

JUAN. But promise me one boon –

BEATRIZ (*eagerly*). Anything!

JUAN. Promise you will not marry until I return – or you hear I am dead?

BEATRIZ (*confused*). I have never even thought of marrying.

JUAN (*in deadly earnest in spite of his pitiful pretence at a joking tone*). Until I present my double to you – ?

BEATRIZ (*relieved and laughing easily*). Why, I might change my mind then, Don Juan.

JUAN. Will you seal that pledge with a kiss? (*He forces a smile to conceal his longing.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

BEATRIZ (*uncertainly – forcing a laugh*). Yes, Don Juan. (*She lifts her face to him. He starts to kiss her on the lips, but something in her face stops him and he ends by kissing her reverentially on the forehead – forcing a smile.*)

JUAN. There – upon your forehead – for remembrance. The other – for tenderness – is still a promise of my dream.

(*There is a sound of hurrying steps and Juan moves away from Beatriz guiltily. Luis enters from the rear. His face is agitated, full of alarm and anxiety.*)

BEATRIZ (*greeting him eagerly, glad of the interruption*). Father Luis.

LUIS. Juan! I bring you terrible news. (*He sees Juan's drawn sword.*) Ah, you know! It is time you drew your sword.

JUAN (*scornfully*). You mean the scum rises? When I tell them the fleet sails to-morrow –

LUIS. Will you give them Nano to burn at the stake? That is their first demand. (*Beatriz gives a horrified cry.*)

JUAN (*stunned – unbelievably*). Surrender Nano? No, it is impossible. You have heard rumours –

LUIS. Quesada has roused their cruelty to frenzy. (*He points to where a red glow is mounting up in the sky.*) See! They are burning the Indian quarter. May God have mercy!

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*in a rage*). Kill Nano? The curs! I shall order a company of my guard —

LUIS (*looking at him pityingly*). Your guard is leading the mob! (*Reproachfully*.) Juan, Juan, why have you lived in a dream! I warned you time after time. If you had been governor in anything but name —

JUAN (*sinking on the bench — stupidly*). Call the guard. I must order them to disperse.

BEATRIZ (*pityingly*). His mind is sick —

LUIS (*rather peremptorily*). Will you leave us, Beatriz?

BEATRIZ (*obediently*). Yes, Father. (*Then excitedly*.) I must see Bishop Menendez — (*She hurries out, right*.)

LUIS (*comes and slaps Juan on the back — sternly*). Juan! Awake, in God's name!

JUAN (*startled to action, springs to his feet*). I shall protect his life with my own!

LUIS. In order to torture him yourself?

JUAN (*vehemently but guiltily*). A lie! (*Suspicious — resentfully*.) Have you seen him? I gave orders —

LUIS. It is weeks since I was permitted to see him; and you have avoided meeting me. Why?

JUAN (*harshly*). I have no patience with your converting. I need Nano as he is.

LUIS. Because you prefer his heathen myths —

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*controlling an outburst of rage*). Myths? Why myths? Cathay is there. (*He points.*)

LUIS. I was not speaking of Cathay. You are sailing to-morrow? Does this mean you have finally wrung from this poor Indian's agonies a faith in magic fountains — ?

JUAN (*losing control of himself — raging*). Fool! You are like those dullards who, when Columbus said the earth was round, brayed at him for blaspheming! Listen to me! I do not believe Nano, I believe in Nature. Nature is part of God. She can perform miracles. Since this land was discovered have we not found wonders undreamed of before? The points in Nano's story hold true to the facts we know. His home is a beautiful mainland — "A land of flowers," in his own words. Is not Cathay also known as the "Flowery Land"? There are great walled cities with roofs of gold inland to the West. Is not that Marco Polo's land beyond all doubt? And the fountain is in Cathay. All the evidence from around the world proves that! And I shall find it!

LUIS (*pitiingly*). But this evidence is merely fable, legend, the dreams of poets!

JUAN (*furiously*). Have praying and fasting made you an imbecile? What evidence had Columbus? And you — you believe Christ lived and died. Well, have you talked with men who saw Him in the manger, or on the cross?

LUIS. Juan, this is blasphemy!

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*with bitter despair*). Then let it be! I have prayed to Him in vain.

LUIS. Juan!

JUAN (*with all the power of his will in the words*). Let me be damned for ever if Nature will only grant me youth upon this earth again!

LUIS (*horrified*). Juan! You defy your God!

JUAN. There is no God but Love – no heaven but youth!

LUIS (*looks at his tortured face intently – suddenly realizes – in a tone of great pity*). So that is it – I have been blind. I thought your love saw in her – a child, a daughter!

JUAN (*intensely*). A child – yes – for a time – but one morning standing by the fountain she was a woman. More than a woman! She was the Spirit of Youth, Hope, Ambition, Power to dream and dare! She was all that I had lost. She was Love and the Beauty of Love! So I loved her, loved her with all the intensity of Youth's first love – when youth was dead! Oh, it was monstrous folly, I admit. I called myself a senile fool! I suffered with the damned. I lived in hell without the recompense of being dead! And I loved her more – and more! (*His head sinks down on his hands. A great sob racks his whole body.*)

LUIS (*overcome by compassion, his voice trembling*). Old friend – God in His Mercy have pity on you! (*He is interrupted by the hurried entrance of Beatriz from the right.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

BEATRIZ (*indignantly*). Bishop Menendez says he can do nothing – that you must give Nano up! (*The angry tumult of a mob marching is heard from the distance. Frightenedly.*) Listen! Oh, Don Juan, you will save him, will you not?

JUAN (*starting up – in a voice in which rage and apprehension are blended*). I must! (*He listens to the rising murmur of the mob. As he does so his whole body stiffens into defiant determination. He becomes in an instant the commander again.*) Cowardly rabble! (*He springs to the entrance on the left and shouts to the soldier on guard.*) Bring Nano! (*He comes back to where Beatriz and Luis are standing and looks around the courtyard as if measuring his position.*) I shall face them here. Take Beatriz away, Luis.

BEATRIZ. I wish to stay with you!

MENENDEZ (*enters from the right*). Juan! (*Seeing his drawn sword – apprehensively.*) What? You will defy them? Then you are lost! Yield to them, I advise you. Give Nano to justice. (*While he is speaking Nano is half carried in by the soldiers. He is limp and exhausted.*)

JUAN (*with wild scorn*). Ah, High Priest! Deliver him up, eh?

MENENDEZ. Juan! You are impious! (*Angrily.*) It is sacrilege – to compare this Indian dog – you mock our Blessed Saviour! You are cursed – I wash my hands – His will be done! (*He turns and strides back into the house, right.*)

THE FOUNTAIN

LUIS (*at a nearer roar from the mob*). Juan! Escape! There is still time —

JUAN. Run from jackals! Is my honour dead?

LUIS (*as a smashing battering sounds from outside*). They are at the outer gate! Come, Beatriz, in God's name!

(*She struggles, but he succeeds in getting her as far as the entrance, right. A last crashing smash is heard as the outer gate gives way. A moment later the advance guard of the mob pour in — all of the lower rabble, these. Some wave torches above their heads. All are armed with pikes, knives, and various crude weapons that they have picked up or stolen.*)

JUAN (*in a roar of command*). Back!

(*They hesitate for a moment. Then they see Nano and with yells of fury rush for him around the fountain. Juan springs to meet them. With quick thrusts and cuts of his sword he kills or wounds four of the foremost, who drop to the ground. The rest fall back frightened and awed for the moment. In this lull the remainder of the mob pour in from the rear, crowding and jostling each other. They are a nondescript crowd, ranging from nobles, richly dressed, soldiers, sailors,*

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to the riff-raff of the criminal element in bright-coloured rags. There are a number of monks among them, Franciscans who urge them on, a few Dominicans who plead for restraint.)

THE MOB. Don Juan! It's the Governor – push back there! – To the flames with the Indian dog! Seize him! Stand aside, Don Juan! Heretic! He's bewitched! The dog refused baptism! Torture!

JUAN (*sternly*). I will kill the man who touches this Indian! (*He walks up and down before them, his sword ready to thrust, looking from eye to eye – scathingly.*) Scoundrels! Where is your valour now? Prick up your courage! (*Mockingly.*) Come! Who wishes to die?

A NOBLE. We demand justice!

(Yells of approval from the crowd. They push in closer. Juan levels his sword at the breast of the nearest who springs back with a frightened cry. The mob sways and surges, close packed and indecisive, cowed by Juan's eyes.)

QUESADA (*suddenly pushing his way to the front of the crowd – pointing at Nano, frantically*). Give him up! You are bewitched!

(The mob are again aroused. There are cries of "To the stake! Torture!" etc.)

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN. No! (*Yells of rage. The mob surges forward. Juan raises his sword.*) I will kill the first one who – (*They recoil again, all but Quesada. With his free hand Juan sweeps him to one side contemptuously – then fiercely threatening the crowd.*) Will you rebel against the Governor of your King? Then you are traitors to Spain! And, by God's blood, I will hang one of you on every tree!

(The crowd gives way by inches, sullenly, their yells reduced for the moment to a rebellious muttering: "The King will remove you! Hang the Indians! Hang them! Hang Nano!" etc.)

A SOLDIER. We mean no harm to you, Don Juan. Keep your word to us. Order the fleet to sail. (*A yell of acclamation from the soldiers and sailors.*)

QUESADA. And give over that dog! The Inquisition shall know you protect infidels!

JUAN. I am Spain's soldier, not the Inquisition's! Soldiers and sailors! I tell you it is in Spain's service this Indian's life is spared. The fleet sails to-morrow – and we need Nano to pilot our voyage! (*A tumult from the bewildered crowd. Shouts of various nature: "The fleet sails! To-morrow! Hurrah! He jokes! He mocks us! Spare him? No luck with a heathen on board! What does he mean? Guide us? No! The curse of the Church!" But the mob is puzzled, blundering, and Juan con-*

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tinues with a sort of condescension as if he were speaking to children.) Silence! Since you are so stupid, I must explain. This Nano was born on the mainland — Cathay! — our goal, do you understand? — and I have put off sailing while I questioned him. We must have his knowledge. He must be our pilot. *(With a fierce glance at Nano as if to let his threat strike home.)* And if he fails in his promise to me, I will gladly give him to you for punishment.

QUESADA *(furiously)*. You say this to save him!

JUAN. Soldiers, sailors, I appeal to you! Can this mad monk lead you to conquest? You must decide between us. *(The crowd are all turning his way, becoming greedily enthusiastic. Juan sees the psychological moment to play a trump card.)* But to convince you finally, listen to Nano. Speak, Nano! Tell them what you told me — of the golden cities. Speak! *(Then under cover of the crowd's shouts of "Down with the dog! Torture! Hear! Let him speak! Don Juan says let him!" etc., he adds in a fierce whisper to the Indian.)* If you wish ever to see your home again!

NANO *(mechanically, in a clear monotonous voice, with expressionless face)*. A big land — far mighty cities — gold —

JUAN. You hear? The cities of gold! *(The crowd murmurs excitedly.)*

NANO. There is much gold. The houses have gold on them.

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A SOLDIER. Cipango! We'll storm their cities for them!

A SAILOR. Loot, my bullies!

JUAN. Glory and gold for all of you! And now go! (*The crowd are jubilant. Shouts of "Up anchor! Ahoy Cathay! At last! We sail! Sack! Riches! Gold!" etc. Juan shouts above the tumult.*) Go! Disperse! To-morrow we sail! (*A voice cries, "Long live Don Juan!" The whole mob takes it up. Juan begins to give way under the strain — wearily.*) Go. Go.

THE MOB (*led by a sailor, takes up a sort of chanty song in mighty chorus, dancing wildly, waving their torches, crowding out, rear.*)

The Cities of Gold
In far Cathay —
Their great Khan is old,
And his wealth untold
In prize for our bold
Who sail away.
Aye!

His gold for our bold who sail away! !

BEATRIZ (*as the last of the mob disappear — rushing up to Juan with great admiration*). You have saved him! What they have said of you is true indeed — lion by nature as well as name!

JUAN (*bitterly*). Lion? No! Tricky politician! If I had been the Juan of long ago, I would not

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have pleaded or bargained with such curs. I would have —

(He raises his sword threateningly — then lets his arm sink limply. The sword slips from his fingers and falls to the ground.)

BEATRIZ *(kneels quickly and presents its hilt to him)*. I give you back your sword — to bring good fortune. Now you must find the golden cities!

JUAN *(taking it — longingly)*. I care only for the one, Beatriz — the golden city of Youth, where you are queen.

(She looks into his face smilingly, mystified as —

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE SEVEN

SCENE. *Four months later — a strip of beach on the Florida coast — a bright, moonlight night. The forest runs diagonally from right, front, to left, rear — a wall of black shadow. The sand gleams a pallid white in the moonlight. The rhythmic ebb and flow of waves is heard — their voice on a windless night of calm.*

As the curtain rises, an Indian is discovered, standing in the moonlight, just out of the shadow of the forest. He is old, but still erect and warrior-like, a chief by his demeanour. His body, naked save for a piece of deerskin at his waist, is elaborately painted, as is his face. A knot of feathers is in his hair. A tomahawk and flint knife are at his waist. He is motionless and silent as a statue, one hand clasping his unslung bow as if it were a staff, but he peers intently at some object in the ocean before him. Finally, he gives an ejaculation of surprise and makes a motion of summons to the forest behind him. The Medicine Man glides out of the darkness to his side. This latter is incredibly old and shrunken, daubed with many insignia in paint, wearing many ornaments of bone and shell. They confer together in low tones with much pantomime. A man is evidently swimming toward them from some strange object out at sea. Other Indians steal from the forest, form a group in the shadow behind the two, point out

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to sea, gesticulate. At a sharp command from the Chief, they unsling their bows, fit arrows to strings, crouch in an ambush in the shadow. The Chief does likewise and stands waiting, prepared for what may come. Nano walks up the beach from front, left. His naked body glistens with drops of water. He sees the Chief and stops, raising his right hand above his head. The Chief makes a sign. The other Indians dart from their ambush and surround Nano.

CHIEF. Bind him.

NANO (*calmly*). Is a brother an enemy? (*They all start with surprise at hearing their own language. Nano goes on.*) This is the land of my fathers. I am Nano, a son of Boanu, who was a chief. (*They all stare at him. The Chief makes a sign to the Medicine Man, who comes forward and examines Nano's face intently.*)

MEDICINE MAN. His words are truth. He is Nano — or an evil spirit in his body. (*He shakes a charm at him.*) Are you from the Land of the Dead?

NANO. I am of the living. They did not chain me. They think I fear the sea. I come to warn you. I swam from the great canoes. They are the warships of the Spaniards.

CHIEF (*mystified*). What are Spaniards? Their winged canoes are like the boats of Gods.

NANO. These are no Gods. They are men who

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die from wounds. Their faces are white, but they are evil. They wear shirts that arrows cannot pierce. They have strange sticks that spit fire and kill. Their devils make them strong. But they are not true warriors. They are thieves and rapers of women.

CHIEF. Have they no God?

NANO (*with scorn*). Their God is a thing of earth! It is this! (*He touches a gold ornament that the Chief wears.*)

MEDICINE MAN (*mystified*). Gold? Gold is sacred to the Sun. It can be no God itself.

NANO (*contemptuously*). They see only things, not the spirit behind things. Their hearts are muddy as a pool in which deer have trampled. Listen. Their Medicine Men tell of a God who came to them long ago in the form of a man. He taught them to scorn things. He taught them to look for the spirit behind things. In revenge, they killed him. They tortured him as a sacrifice to their Gold Devil. They crossed two big sticks. They drove little sticks through his hands and feet and pinned him on the others – thus.

(*He illustrates. A murmur of horror and indignation goes up among them.*)

MEDICINE MAN. To torture a God! How did they dare?

NANO. Their devils protected them. And now each place they go, they carry that figure of a

THE FOUNTAIN

dying God. They do this to strike fear. They command you to submit when you see how even a God who fought their evil was tortured. (*Proudly.*) But I would not.

MEDICINE MAN (*suspiciously*). If you defied them, how are you alive?

NANO. I am craftier than they. They have an old chief who is cursed with madness. Him I told of the Spring of Life. I said I would find it for him.

MEDICINE MAN. Only the Gods can reveal it. Why have you told this lie?

NANO (*fiercely*). Revenge! I have made a plan. Is there a spring near?

CHIEF (*mystified*). Yes. In the forest.

NANO (*with satisfaction*). Good! Listen. This mad chief is the mightiest among them. Without him they would turn cowards. To-morrow night I will lead him to the spring. You must lie hidden. We will kill him there. Is this clear?

CHIEF. Yes.

NANO. I will swim back now. I escaped to tell you of my plan and warn you. They would lay waste your land as they did mine. They killed my wives and children. They burned. They tortured. They chained warriors neck to neck. They beat them with a whip to dig in the fields like squaws. This old chief led them. My heart is fire. Until he dies, it will know no peace.

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CHIEF. I begin to feel your hatred.

NANO. Then remember to hide by the spring.

CHIEF. We will not forget.

NANO. It is well.

(He turns and strides down to the sea. They stand watching him in silence.)

MEDICINE MAN *(uneasily, thoughtful)*. Only devils could build great canoes that fly with wings. My brothers, they are evil spirits. Nano has made war with them. They have beaten him. Can we trust his plan?

CHIEF. What is your counsel?

MEDICINE MAN. I have heard the voice of the Great Spirit speaking in the night. Let us first try to propitiate their devils.

CHIEF. I do not know how to war with devils. That is your duty. Let us summon the council.

(He makes a sign at which his followers disappear silently into the wood. He and the Medicine Man follow as —

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE EIGHT

SCENE. *The same. High noon of the following day — glaring sunlight on the beach, an atmosphere of oppressive heat and languor. The earth seems dead, preserved in some colourless, molten fluid. The forest is a matted green wall. The sound of the sea has the quality of immense exhaustion.*

On the beach, a sort of makeshift altar is being erected — two round boulders supporting a flat slab of rock. On top of the slab is placed a shallow bowl made of bark. A group of Indians, under the direction of the Medicine Man, are hurriedly putting on the finishing touches to this shrine. They keep casting awed apprehensive glances seaward. The Medicine Man is binding two branches of a tree together in the form of a cross. All the Indians are feathered and painted as for an unusual solemn occasion.

THE INDIANS (*their eyes on the sea as they work — frightenedly*). The small canoes leave the great winged ones. They are coming! The sun gleams on their shirts that arrows cannot pierce. Their fire-sticks glitter in the sun. Their faces are turned. Their faces are pale! They are watching us!

MEDICINE MAN (*finishing his work*). Keep your hearts brave! (*Giving the cross to two Indians.*) Here. This is their totem pole. Stand it there. (*They dig a hole in the sand before the altar and set*

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the cross there; but they make the mistake of setting it head down. The Medicine Man grunts with satisfaction.) They will think we adore the same devil. They will leave us in peace.

INDIAN (*his eyes on the sea*). The last canoe has left the great ships. (*He gives a cry of fear echoed by the others.*) Aie! Fire and smoke!

(They cower. The hollow boom of a cannon fired in salute reverberates over the sea. They all shrink with terror, bowing their heads.)

INDIAN (*awestruck*). The Thunder fights with them!

INDIAN. They are white Gods!

MEDICINE MAN (*frightened himself, but rallying his followers sternly*). You have the hearts of squaws. Quick! Where is the gold?

(An Indian comes to him with an earthen-ware vessel. He empties it out on the bowl on the top of the altar. It is full of gold nuggets of different sizes. They form a heap glowing in the sun.)

INDIANS. They come! They come!

MEDICINE MAN (*sternly*). Pretend to worship their gold devil but pray to our Great Father, the Sun. He can defeat all devils. Pray to him! (*An Indian starts to beat rhythmically on the small drum. The Medicine Man lifts his shrill voice in the first*

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strains of the chant. Immediately the others all join in as if hypnotized.) Great Father, Mighty One, Ruler of Earth. Maker of Days. Ripener of the Corn. Creator of Life. Look down upon us out of your Sky-Tent. Let our song rise to you. Let it enter your heart. Mighty One, hear us. Hide not your face in clouds. Bless us at the dawn. And at the day's end.

(They form a circle and dance about the altar, their eyes raised to the sun overhead. Their chant hides the noise of the Spaniards landing. Then the Spaniards appear from the left, front. First comes Juan, his face wild and haggard, his eyes obsessed. He is accompanied by Luis. Following him are a squad of Soldiers, guarding Nano, who is in chains. Then come four Franciscan Monks, led by Quesada, who wears a sword and pistol over his robe. The others carry crosses. Following them is a group of Nobles, richly dressed. Then come ranks of Soldiers. They all stare at this Indian ceremony with contemptuous scorn.)

JUAN (*irritably*). Make them cease their accursed noise, Luis. Let Nano speak to them.

LUIS (*advancing toward the Indians — in a loud but friendly voice, raising his right hand*). Peace, brothers.

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(The Indians stop, petrified, staring with awe at the white men. The Medicine Man lifts his right hand and advances a step toward Luis. Quesada notices the cross, utters a furious exclamation, strides forward to verify his suspicion. When he sees that it is indeed upside down his face grows livid with fury.)

QUESADA. The cross head down! The black mass! *(He pulls out his pistol.)* Blaspheming dog!

(He fires. The Medicine Man falls. The other Indians who have shrunk back toward the woods in terror at his first move, now turn tail in panic and flee.)

LUIS *(in horror)*. Stop, Quesada!

(Quesada pulls up the cross and is setting it back upright when the Medicine Man, by a last dying effort, draws his knife, and writhing to his feet, plunges it into Quesada's back. They both fall together, the Indian dead. Quesada shudders and is still. A yell of rage goes up from the Spaniards. They rush forward toward the woods as if to pursue the Indians, but Juan shouts a command.)

JUAN. Halt! Fools! *(They stop prudently but sullenly. Juan turns to Luis, who is kneeling beside Quesada.)* Is he dead?

THE FOUNTAIN

LUIS. Yes. (*Crossing himself.*) May his soul rest in peace. (*All echo this, crossing themselves.*)

JUAN. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. (*Mockingly.*) And now it is his eye, his tooth. (*Then with a shudder.*) Take him away. This is a bloody baptism for Cathay. (*Turning to Nano as the Soldiers carry the bodies aside.*) Is this the land, Nano?

NANO (*his eyes smouldering with hate*). Yes.

JUAN. You said it was a wonder land – a land of flowers. I see no flowers.

NANO (*in a sinister tone*). In the forest – flowers grow by a spring –

JUAN (*harshly – with an apprehensive glance about*). Silence!

A NOBLE (*from the group that has been stirring impatiently*). Your Excellency. The banners of Castile and Aragon wait on your pleasure.

JUAN (*making a confused gesture as if wiping cobwebs from his brain*). Yes – yes – I must take possession. Bring the banners. (*He kneels on one knee. They all do likewise.*) In the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and of his most gracious Majesty, the sovereign of Castile and Aragon, I do hereby annex to his dominions this land and all its environs. And I call the land Florida.

(*He bends and kisses the sand. The banners are planted in the ground, where they hang motionless from their poles. Juan,*

THE FOUNTAIN

having made this effort, seems to fall into a stupor.)

A NOBLE (*in a mocking whisper*). A pretty name!

A NOBLE. He has grown imbecile. Will he go spring-hunting here, too? My faith, with all the water he has drunk in the past four months, he must be flooded. (*They all snicker at this.*)

A NOBLE (*impatiently*). Will he never get off his knees and let us rise?

LUIS (*sensing what is going on behind their backs – to Juan – who seems to be praying with bowed head – plucking his sleeve*). Juan! Come!

JUAN (*vaguely*). I was praying – to what God who knows?

(He rises to his feet weakly. At this, they all rise.)

A NOBLE (*pointing excitedly*). Look! In that bowl on the stones. Is it not gold? (*They all rush forward to the altar. The Noble picks up a piece of it – his voice hoarse with greedy triumph.*) Gold! (*They all grab at the bowl, upsetting its contents on the sand. They bend down and clutch for it crying.*) Gold! This must be a rich land! There must be more! The Golden Cities are near! Cathay at last!

(The Soldiers forget discipline, break ranks, form a disorderly, pushing crowd about their leaders. Even the Monks edge forward inquisitively.)

THE FOUNTAIN

LUIS (*urgently*). Juan! Look! This is disgraceful!

JUAN (*coming to himself with a start — in a furious tone of command*). Get back to your ranks! A brave example you set, nobles of Spain! (*His personality is compelling. They all slink to their former order again, muttering rebelliously. Juan seems suddenly seized with a wild exultation.*) Cathay! We have found Cathay! This is the land — the Flowery Land! Our dreams lie hidden here! Sing the Te Deum! Sing!

(There is an oppressive silence for a moment, in which the heat, the sun glaring on the beach, the green of the forest, all nature seems to lay upon these men a mysterious spell, a sudden exhausted recognition of their own defeat. Then the Franciscan Monks raise their voices mechanically and spiritlessly in the Te Deum. Other listless voices gradually join theirs as —

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE NINE

SCENE. *About midnight – in the forest. Gigantic tree-trunks, entwined with vines in flower, are in the foreground. Festoons of Spanish moss hang clear to the ground from the branches. Through the network one sees a circular clearing, grass-grown, flooded with moonlight. There is the soft murmur of a spring which bubbles from the ground in the centre of this open space. Indians are crouched in ambush among the trees, motionless, their eyes fixed on the clearing.*

The stillness is broken by the whistled call of a bird. The Indians stir alertly. One of them whistles in answer to the call. An Indian creeps swiftly in from the left. The Chief comes from his place of ambush to meet him.

CHIEF. He comes?

INDIAN. He has entered the forest.

CHIEF. I will give Nano the signal when we are ready. Go. Hide.

(The Indian takes a place with the others. The Chief fits an arrow to his bow and crouches in the shadow. There is a pause of silence – then the noise of some one pushing his way through the woods at the rear of the clearing. Nano appears there, followed by Juan.)

JUAN. Why do you stop?

THE FOUNTAIN

NANO. This is the place.

JUAN (*looking around him disappointedly*). This?

NANO. There is the spring.

JUAN (*stepping forward to look at it — with growing anger*). It looks a common spring like any other. Beware, dog! In these past months you have shown me many springs —

NANO (*quickly*). The voyage was long. There were many islands. You forced me to lead you to a spring on each. But I told you the Spring of Life was here.

JUAN. I feared your revenge might lie. (*Relapsed into a mood of sombre preoccupation — bitterly.*) I drank of every one. I closed my eyes. I felt the stirring of rebirth. Fool! Always the mirror in the spring showed me the same loathsome blighted face — (*He groans — then with a harsh laugh.*) A sacred grove, the legend says! Some of those springs bubbled from sandy water! Beautiful maidens? There were none. At one place I found an old hag filling her bowl, who drank and mumbled at me. (*Then in a harsh tone of command.*) Nano! I command you to tell me if you have lied. (*Distractedly.*) I must have certainty, be it of faith or despair!

NANO. This is the spring.

JUAN (*looking around him*). But where are the trees with golden fruit, the maidens, the fountain —? (*Bewildered, staring — grasping at hope.*) And

THE FOUNTAIN

yet — this spot has singular beauty. I feel enchantment. But why do I shudder? (*A low whistled signal comes from the Chief hidden on the edge of the clearing. Juan starts.*) Sssh! What was that?

NANO. A bird (*Insistently*). It is a magic spring. Drink!

JUAN (*bending over the spring*). A mirror of moonlight. The dead eyes of a corpse stare back in mine. (*He kneels by the spring as if fascinated.*) I dare not drink. To whom can I pray? Beatriz! Oh, to hear your voice once more, to see your face! And yet I see you everywhere. Your spirit inspires all things wherever there is beauty. I hear you call in the song of the waves, the wind is your breath, the trees reach out with your arms, the dawn and sunset promise with your lips! You are everywhere and nowhere — part of all life but mine! (*He breaks off, turning distrustful, harried eyes on the impatient Nano — bitterly.*) I am a spectacle for laughter, eh? A grotesque old fool!

NANO (*in a fierce tone of command*). Drink!

JUAN (*hectically — goading himself to action*). The test. Spirit of Eternal Youth, I pray to you! Beatriz!

(*He bends down and drinks. As he does so Nano darts away from him to the woods in front.*)

NANO (*hurriedly*). Kill when he stands again!

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(The Indians can be seen raising their bows, taking aim.)

JUAN *(having drunk, remains kneeling by the spring — in a trembling tone of hesitating joy)*. New life thrills in me! Is it youth? Do I dream? Then let me never wake till the end of time! *(Then harshly.)* Coward! How often have you looked death in the face. Are you afraid of life? Open! Open and see! *(He opens his eyes and stares down into the spring. A terrible groan tears from his breast.)* O God! *(His grief is turned immediately into a frenzy of rage.)* Treacherous dog. You betrayed me.

(He leaps to his feet, drawing his sword. There is a twanging of many bows, the whizz of a flight of arrows. Juan falls, clutches at the grass, is still. The Indians pour out into the clearing but keep a cautious distance from Juan.)

NANO *(with more courage than they, he bends down over the body)*. He wore no shining shirt. He is dead. *(He does a wild dance of savage triumph beside the body — then stops as suddenly.)* Quick. To their camp. The great Spirit has made them helpless. Be brave and kill!

(He runs swiftly into the woods, followed by the whole band, brandishing their weapons. There is a pause. Then the fierce yells of the savages as they fall

THE FOUNTAIN

*upon the sleeping camp, the howls of
terror of the Spaniards, the screams of
the dying, a few futile musket-shots.)*

(The Curtain Falls)

SCENE TEN

SCENE. *The same clearing in the woods some hours later. There is no intervening fringe of trees in this scene, the open space is in full view. The Spring is at centre. The wall of forest forms a semicircular background. As the curtain rises, there is a pitch-blackness and silence except for the murmur of the Spring. Then the sound of some one struggling to rise from the ground, falling back again with a groan of pain. Juan's voice comes out of the darkness.*

JUAN (*as if he had just regained consciousness — then with a groan of rage and pain as memory returns*). Fool! Why did I look? I might have died in my dream. (*A pause — weakly.*) Sleep seems humming in my ears. Or is it — death! — death, the Merciful One! (*He stirs and his voice suddenly grows strident.*) No, No! Why have I lived! To die alone like a beast in the wilderness? (*With a bitter mocking despair.*) O Son of God, is this Thy justice? Does not the Saviour of Man know magnanimity? True, I prayed for a miracle which was not Thine. Let me be damned then, but (*passionately*) let me believe in Thy Kingdom! Show me Thy miracle — a sign — a word — a second's vision of what I am that I should have lived and died! A test, Lord God of Hosts! (*He laughs with a scornful bravado.*) Nothing! (*But even as he speaks a strange unearthly light begins to flood down upon a spot on the edge of the clearing on the right. Startled*

THE FOUNTAIN

in spite of himself.) This light – the moon has waned – (*Beneath the growing light a form takes shape – a tall woman's figure, like a piece of ancient sculpture, shrouded in long draperies of a blue that is almost black. The face is a pale mask with features indistinguishable save for the eyes that stare straight ahead with a stony penetration that sees through and beyond things. Her arms are rigid at her sides, the palms of the hands turned outward. Juan stares at her, defiance striving with his awe.*) What are you? (*Forcing a sneer.*) An angel in answer to my prayer? (*He cannot control a shudder – tries to calm himself. He stares at the figure – after a pause, boldly.*) Or are you Death? Why then I have often laughed in your eyes! (*Tauntingly.*) Off with your mask, coward! (*Mockingly but uneasy.*) Delightful Lady, you are enigmatic. One must embrace you with bold arms, tear off your masquerade. That was my pastime once – to play at love as gaming. Were I the Juan of long ago – but you see I am old now and wounded. (*He pauses. The figure is frozen. He asks a bit falteringly.*) Are you – death? Then wait – (*In passionate invocation.*) O Beatriz! Let me hear your voice again in mercy of farewell! (*As if in answer to this the voice of Beatriz sings from the darkness.*)

VOICE. Love is a flower
For ever blooming
Life is a fountain
For ever leaping
Upward to catch the golden sunlight

THE FOUNTAIN

Upward to reach the azure heaven
Failing, falling,
Ever returning,
To kiss the earth that the flower may
live.

JUAN (*raptly*). Youth! (*As the song is sung, the same mystical light floods down slowly about the Spring, which is transformed into a gigantic fountain, whose waters, arched with rainbows, seem to join earth and sky, forming a shimmering veil, which hides the background of forest. Juan and the Figure are left at the edge of this, on the outside. The form of Beatriz appears within as if rising from the spring. She dances in ecstasy—the personified spirit of the fountain. Juan cries with a voice trembling with joy.*) The Fountain! Let me drink! (*He tries to drag himself to it but cannot—in anguish.*) Must I die—? (*Making a furious gesture of defiance at the Figure and struggling to rise.*) No! I defy you! (*Exhausted, he sinks back crying beseechingly.*) Beatriz! (*But she seems not to see or hear him. Juan half sobs in despair.*) She will not see! She will not hear! Fountain, cruel as the heart of youth, what mercy have you for the old and wounded? (*He sinks down overcome by weakness. Beatriz vanishes from the fountain. In her place appears the form of a Chinese poet. He is a venerable old man with the mild face of a dreamer and scholar. He carries a block and writes upon it with a brush, absorbed in contemplation. Juan looking up and seeing him—startled.*) What are you? (*Groping at some clue in*

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his memory.) I know — that night in Granada — the Moor's tale — (*Excitedly.*) Of the poet from the East who told his father the Fountain lie! Are you not that poisoner of life? (*The Poet raises his hand as if in summons. The form of the Moorish minstrel of Scene One appears at his side.*) The Moor! (*Raging.*) Infidel dog! Your lie has cursed me! (*The form of Nano appears at the other side of the Chinese poet. Juan struggles to reach his sword in a fury.*) Murderer! (*Then his eyes are caught by a fourth figure which materializes beside the Moor. It is Luis as he was in Scene One. With a cry of joy.*) Luis — old friend — (*Then as Luis seems neither to see nor hear him, he sinks back helplessly.*) No — another mocking phantom! (*He watches the Chinese poet, who seems to be reading what he has written to all of them.*) See! The dead lie to the living. It passes on — from East to West — round the round world — from old worlds to new — cheating the old and wounded — Ha!

(He laughs harshly and wildly. The Chinese poet takes the Indian by one hand, the Moor by the other. These latter stretch out their hands to Luis, who takes them, thus completing the circle. Beatriz' voice can be heard singing.)

VOICE. Life is a field
For ever growing
Beauty a fountain
For ever flowing

THE FOUNTAIN

Upward beyond the source of sunshine
Upward beyond the azure heaven,
Born of God but
Ever returning
To merge with earth that the field may
live.

(As she sings, the four forms disappear as if they were dissolved in the fountain).

JUAN *(lost in the ecstasy of her song)*. Sing on, Youth! *(With a start as the song stops — stupidly.)* The ghosts are gone. What is the answer to their riddle? I am no poet. I have striven for what the hand can grasp. What is left when Death makes the hand powerless? *(Addresses the Figure pitifully, trying to mock.)* O Mighty Relaxer of hands, have you no vision for the graspers of earth? *(The Figure raises a summoning hand. One by one, within the fountain, solemn figures materialize. First the Chinese poet, now robed as a Buddhist priest; then the Moorish minstrel, dressed as a priest of Islam; and then the Medicine Man as he was in Scene Eight, decked out in all the paint and regalia of his office; lastly, Luis, the Dominican monk of the present. Each one carries the symbol of his religion before him. They appear clearly for a moment, then fade from sight, seeming to dissolve in the fountain. Juan has stared at them with straining eyes — in a bewildered voice.)* All faiths — they vanish — are one and equal — within — *(Awe and reverence creeping into his voice.)* What are you, Fountain? That

THE FOUNTAIN

from which all life springs and to which it must return — God! Are all dreams of you but the one dream? (*Bowing his head miserably.*) I do not know. Come back, Youth. Tell me this secret! (*For a moment the voice of Beatriz is heard from the darkness.*)

Death is a mist
Veiling sunrise.

(*Juan seems to fall into a rapt spell. The form of an old Indian woman appears from the left. She falters forward, a wooden bowl under her arm, as if she were going to fill it at the fountain.*)

JUAN (*recognizing her aghast*). Damned hag! I remember you waited beside a spring to mock me! Begone! (*But the old woman stretches out her hands to him with a mysterious beseeching. Juan shudders — then after a struggle with himself, gets to his feet painfully.*) So be it. Sit here by me. I am old, too — and, poor woman, you cannot fill your bowl there. Come. (*He grasps her hands. In a flash her mask of age disappears. She is Beatriz. Juan gazes at her in an ecstasy — faltering, his mind groping.*) Beatriz! Age — Youth — They are the same rhythm of eternal life! (*Without his noticing it, Beatriz recedes from him and vanishes in the Fountain. He raises his face to the sky — with halting joy.*) Light comes! Light creeps into my soul! (*Then he sees the Figure walk slowly from its place and vanish in the Fountain.*) Death is no more! (*The Figure materializes*

THE FOUNTAIN

again within the Fountain but this time there is no mask, the face is that of Beatriz, her form grown tall, majestic, vibrant with power. Her arms are raised above her head. Her whole body soars upward. A radiant, dancing fire, proceeding from the source of the Fountain, floods over and envelops her until her figure is like the heart of its flame. Juan stares at this vision for a moment, then sinks on his knees — exultantly.) I see! Fountain Everlasting, time without end! Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring Death! All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally! O aspiring fire of life, sweep the dark soul of man! Let us burn in thy unity! *(Beatriz' voice rises triumphantly.)*

VOICE. God is a flower
For ever blooming
God is a fountain
For ever flowing.

(The song ceases. The light fades. There is darkness. Juan's voice is heard sobbing with happiness.)

JUAN. O God, Fountain of Eternity, Thou art the All in One, the One in All — the Eternal Becoming which is Beauty! *(He falls unconscious. A pause. Then the faint misty light of the dawn floats over the clearing. Juan is seen lying where he had fallen. There is the noise of some one approaching from the woods in the rear, Luis and a brother Dominican enter from the forest.)*

LUIS *(seeing Juan)*. God be praised! *(He rushes*

THE FOUNTAIN

forward and kneels by Juan's body. Juan stirs and groans.) He moves! Juan! It's Luis! Our friends were murdered. A boat from the fleet is waiting —

JUAN (*in a dreaming ecstasy*). God — Thou art all —

DOMINICAN. He prays.

LUIS. Delirium. Let us carry him. We'll sail for the nearest settlement —

JUAN (*as they raise him*). Light! I see and know!

LUIS. It is the dawn, Juan.

JUAN (*exultantly*). The dawn!

(*They carry him out as —*

The Curtain Falls)

SCENE ELEVEN

SCENE. *Some months later. The courtyard of a Dominican monastery in Cuba. A crude little home-made fountain is in centre. This is the only adornment of the quadrangle of bald, sun-baked earth, enclosed on the left and in the rear by a high white wall, on the right by the monastery building itself. The entrance to this is an arched doorway surmounted by a crucifix of carved wood. Two niches on either side of this door shelter primitive wooden figures of the Holy Family and Saint Dominic. In the wall, centre, is another arched door with a cross above it. Beyond the wall nature can be seen and felt — vivid, colourful, burgeoning with the manifold, compelling life of the tropics. Palm trees lean over the wall casting their graceful shadows within. Vines in flower have climbed to the top and are starting to creep down inside.*

A sunset sky of infinite depth glows with mysterious splendour.

As the curtain rises, Juan and the Father Superior are discovered. Juan is asleep, reclining on a sort of improvised invalid's chair, his cloak wrapped around him, facing the fountain. He is pale and emaciated but his wasted countenance has gained an entirely new quality, the calm of a deep spiritual serenity. The Father Superior is a portly monk with a simple round face, grey hair and beard. His large eyes have

THE FOUNTAIN

the opaque calm of a ruminating cow's. The door in the rear is opened and Luis enters. He closes the door carefully and tiptoes forward.

LUIS (*in a whisper*). He is sleeping?

FATHER SUPERIOR. As you see, Father.

LUIS (*looking down at Juan*). How calm his face is — as if he saw a vision of peace.

FATHER SUPERIOR. It is a blessed miracle he has lived so long.

LUIS. He has been waiting. (*Sadly.*) And now, I am afraid his desire is fulfilled — but not as he dreamed. Rather the cup of gall and wormwood —

FATHER SUPERIOR (*mystified*). You mean the caravel brings him bad tidings?

LUIS. Yes; and I must wake him to prepare his mind.

FATHER SUPERIOR. I will leave you with him. It is near vespers time. (*He turns and goes into the monastery.*)

LUIS (*touching Juan on the arm — gently*). Juan, awake. (*Juan opens his eyes.*) The caravel has anchored.

JUAN. From Porto Rico?

LUIS. Yes.

JUAN (*with an air of certainty — with exultant joy*). Then Beatriz is here!

LUIS (*disturbed — evasively*). There has been a frightful insurrection of the Indians. Diego was

THE FOUNTAIN

killed. (*Hastily.*) But I will not trouble you with that. (*Then slowly.*) Beatriz comes to nurse you – (*With warning emphasis*) – her second father, those were her words.

JUAN (*smiling*). You need not emphasize. I know her heart. (*Then earnestly.*) But I must tell her my truth. (*Then with a sort of pleading for assurance.*) It is for that I have waited, to tell her of the love I bore her – now – as farewell – when she cannot misunderstand. (*Proudly.*) My love was no common thing. It was the one time Beauty touched my life. I wish to live in her memory as what she was to me. (*Sinking back – with a flickering smile, weakly.*) Come, old friend, are you grown so ascetic you deny my right to lay this Golden City – the only one I ever conquered – at the feet of Beauty?

LUIS (*kindly persuasive*). Silence is better, Juan. You should renounce –

JUAN (*gently*). All is renounced. But do you begrudge a traveller if he begs a flower from this earth, a last token of the world's grace, to lend farewell the solace of regret?

LUIS (*more and more troubled*). Juan – I – I speak because – you have suffered – and now – I would not have you suffer more, dear friend. (*Then blurt-ing out most brusquely.*) The caravel brings you a surprise. Your nephew, Juan, has arrived from Spain and comes from Porto Rico to greet you.

THE FOUNTAIN

JUAN (*vaguely*). My nephew? (*The sound of voices comes from inside the monastery.*) Beatriz!

(*The Father Superior appears in the doorway ushering in Beatriz and Juan's nephew. They are followed by the Duenna and the Nephew's Servant, who carries his master's cloak and a lute. During the following scene these two remain standing respectfully by the doorway for a time, then go back into the monastery, the Servant leaving the cloak and lute on the ground beside the doorway. The Father Superior retires immediately. Luis, after a clasp of Juan's hand, also withdraws, exchanging greetings as he passes the Nephew and Beatriz. Beatriz glows with fulfilment, is very apparently deeply in love. The Nephew is a slender, graceful young cavalier. He is dressed richly.*)

BEATRIZ (*halting a moment with a shocked exclamation as she sees Juan's wasted face — then rushing forward and flinging herself on her knees beside his chair. Hastily*). Don Juan! Oh, this is happiness — to find you still — recovered from your wounds! Oh, I'll say prayers of thanksgiving! (*Impulsively she kisses him.*)

JUAN (*thrilled — choked — unable to say but one word*). Beatriz! Beatriz!

THE FOUNTAIN

NEPHEW (*kneels and kisses Juan's hand. Startled, Juan's eyes search his face keenly, apprehensive of what he, too, plainly sees there*). I greet you, sir. God grant you may soon be strong again.

JUAN (*weakly*). Soon – I shall be strong – against all wounds. (*After a pause.*) And so your name is Juan, too?

NEPHEW. In your honour. Though I can add no honour to it, I hope to bear it worthily.

JUAN (*hostility creeping into his tone*). You come out here adventuring?

NEPHEW. I come to serve Spain!

JUAN (*harshly*). A heart as steeled as your sword. Have you that?

BEATRIZ (*eagerly – somewhat hurt by Juan's reception*). Oh, he is brave! When the mob tried to storm the palace it was Juan who led the defenders.

JUAN (*more and more agitated – trying to hide his growing resentment under effusive amiability*). Bravely done! But you have doubtless heard great tales of mountains of jewels – Golden Cities of Cathay – you hope to grow rich.

NEPHEW (*proudly*). I do not care for riches; and as for Golden Cities, I only wish to plant Spain's banner on their citadels!

JUAN (*inspired by respect in spite of himself*). Brave dreams! Echoes blown down the wind of years.

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BEATRIZ (*looking at the Nephew with great pride as Juan searches her face*). He is as you were in my mother's tales. (*She and the Nephew are held by each other's eyes.*)

JUAN (*after a conquering struggle with his bitterness – fatalistically*). So – thus old heart – in silence. (*Then rousing himself – intensely.*) But with joy! with joy! (*They look at him in puzzled alarm. He smiles gently at Beatriz.*) Then you have found him at last – my double?

BEATRIZ (*blushing, confusedly*). I – I do not know, Don Juan.

JUAN. Then I know. (*Musing a bit sadly.*) You have stolen my last gesture. An old man had a tale to tell you – oh, so brave a tale! – but now he sees that if youth cannot, age must keep its secrets! A sad old ghost to haunt your memory, that would be a poor wedding gift. (*They again look from him to each other, mystified and apprehensive. Juan suddenly looks up at them – with a startling directness.*) You love each other! (*He hurries on with feverish gaiety.*) Forgive – I'm a rough soldier – and there is need for haste. Quick. Do you not ask my blessing?

BEATRIZ (*falling on her knees beside him – happily*). Oh, yes, good Don Juan. (*The Nephew kneels beside her.*)

JUAN (*he raises his hands over their heads*). Youth of this earth – love – hail – and farewell! May you be blessed for ever!

THE FOUNTAIN

(He touches their heads with his hands — then sinks back, closing his eyes. They rise and stand looking down at him uncertainly.)

NEPHEW *(after a pause — in a whisper)*. He wishes to sleep.

BEATRIZ *(as they walk apart, in a whisper, the tears in her eyes)*. Oh, Juan, I'm afraid — and yet — I am not sad.

NEPHEW *(takes her in his arms passionately)*. My life! My soul! *(He kisses her.)*

BEATRIZ. My love!

NEPHEW. Life is beautiful! The earth sings for us! Let us sing, too!

(He strides over to where the lute is and picks it up.)

BEATRIZ *(happily)*. Yes — *(Then reminded.)* Ssshh! *(She points at Juan.)*

NEPHEW *(urgingly)*. He is asleep. We can go out beyond the walls.

(He puts his arms around her and leads her out through the door in rear.)

JUAN *(opening his eyes and looking after them, a tender smile on his lips)*. Yes! Go where Beauty is! Sing!

(From outside the voices of Beatriz and his Nephew are heard mingling in their version of the fountain song)

THE FOUNTAIN

Love is a flower
For ever blooming
Beauty a fountain
For ever flowing
Upward into the source of sunshine,
Upward into the azure heaven;
One with God but
Ever returning
To kiss the earth that the flower may
live.

(Juan listens in an ecstasy, bows his head, weeps. Then he sinks back with closed eyes exhaustedly. Luis enters from the monastery.)

LUIS (*hurries forward in alarm*). Juan! (*He hears the song and is indignant.*) Have they lost all feeling? I will soon stop – (*He starts for the door in rear.*)

JUAN (*in a ringing voice*). No! I am that song! One must accept, absorb, give back, become one-self a symbol! Juan Ponce de Leon is past! He is resolved into the thousand moods of beauty that make up happiness – colour of the sunset, of to-morrow's dawn, breath of the great Trade wind – sunlight on grass, an insect's song, the rustle of leaves, an ant's ambitions. (*In an ecstasy.*) Oh, Luis, I begin to know eternal youth! I have found my Fountain! O Fountain of Eternity, take back this drop, my soul!

(He dies. Luis bows his head and weeps.)

THE FOUNTAIN

FATHER SUPERIOR (*enters from the right*). Vespers. (*Then in a voice of awe as he stares at Juan.*) Is he — dead?

LUIS (*aroused — exaltedly*). No! He lives in God! Let us pray.

(*Luis sinks on his knees beside Juan's body, the Father Superior beside him. He lifts his eyes and clasped hands to heaven and prays fervently. The voices of Beatriz and the Nephew in the fountain song seem to rise to an exultant pitch. Then the chant of the monks swells out, deep and vibrant. For a moment the two strains blend into harmony, fill the air in an all-comprehending hymn of the mystery of life as*

The Curtain Falls)

The Dreamy Kid

A Play in One Act

Characters

MAMMY SAUNDERS

ABE, *her grandson, "The Dreamy Kid"*

CEELY ANN

IRENE

The Dreamy Kid

SCENE. *Mammy Saunders' bedroom in a house just off Carmine Street, New York City. The left of the room, forward, is taken up by a heavy, old-fashioned wooden bedstead with a feather mattress. A gaudy red-and-yellow quilt covers the other bedclothes. Behind the bed, a chest of drawers placed against the left wall. On top of the chest, a small lamp. A rocking-chair stands beside the head of the bed on the right. In the rear wall, toward the right, a low window with ragged white curtains. In the right corner, a washstand with bowl and pitcher. Bottles of medicine, a spoon, a glass, etc., are also on the stand. Farther forward, a door opening on the passage and staircase.*

It is soon after nightfall of a day in early winter. The room is in shadowy half darkness, the only light being a pale glow that seeps through the window from the arc lamp on the street corner, and by which the objects in the room can be dimly discerned. The vague outlines of Mammy Saunders' figure lying in the bed can be seen, and her black face stands out in sharp contrast from the pillows that support her head.

MAMMY (*weakly*). Ceely Ann! (*With faint querulousness.*) Light de lamp, will you? Hit's

THE DREAMY KID

mighty dark in yere. (*After a slight pause.*) Ain't you dar, Ceely Ann?

(*Receiving no reply she sighs deeply and her limbs move uneasily under the bed-clothes. The door is opened and shut and the stooping form of another coloured woman appears in the semi-darkness. She goes to the foot of the bed sobbing softly, and stands there evidently making an effort to control her emotion.*)

MAMMY. Dat you, Ceely Ann?

CEELY (*huskily*). Hit ain't no yuther, Mammy.

MAMMY. Light de lamp, den. I can't see no-whars.

CEELY. Des one second till I finds a match. (*She wipes her eyes with her handkerchief — then goes to the chest of drawers and feels around on the top of it — pretending to grumble.*) Hit beat all how dem pesky little sticks done hide umse'fs. Shoo! Yere dey is. (*She fumbles with the lamp.*)

MAMMY (*suspiciously*). You ain't been cryin', is you?

CEELY (*with feigned astonishment*). Cryin'? I clar' ter goodness you does git de mos' fool notions lyin' dar.

MAMMY (*in a tone of relief*). I mos' thought I yeard you.

CEELY (*lighting the lamp*). 'Deed you ain't.

THE DREAMY KID

(The two women are revealed by the light. Mammy Saunders is an old, white-haired negress about ninety with a wizened face furrowed by wrinkles and withered by old age and sickness. Ceely is a stout woman of fifty or so with grey hair and a round fat face. She wears a loose-fitting gingham dress and a shawl thrown over her head.)

CEELY (*with attempted cheeriness*). Bless yo' soul, I ain't got nothin' to cry 'bout. Yere. Lemme fix you so you'll rest mo' easy. *(She lifts the old woman gently and fixes the pillows.)* Dere. Now, ain't you feelin' better?

MAMMY (*dully*). My strenk don' all went. I can't lift a hand.

CEELY (*hurriedly*). Dat'll all come back ter you de doctor tole me des now when I goes down to de door with him. *(Glibly.)* He say you is de mos' strongest 'oman fo' yo' years ever he sees in de worl'; and he tell me you gwine ter be up and walkin' agin fo' de week's out. *(As she finds the old woman's eyes fixed on her she turns away confusedly and abruptly changes the subject.)* Hit ain't too wa'm in dis room, dat's a fac'.

MAMMY (*shaking her head — in a half whisper*). No, Ceely Ann. Hit ain't no use'n you tellin' me nothin' but de trufe. I feels mighty poo'ly. En I knows hit's on'y wid de blessin' er God I kin las' de night out.

THE DREAMY KID

CEELY (*distractedly*). Ain't no sich a thing! Hush yo' noise, Mammy!

MAMMY (*as if she hadn't heard — in a crooning sing-song*). I'se gwine soon fum dis wicked yearth — and may de Lawd have mercy on dis po' ole sinner. (*After a pause — anxiously.*) All I'se prayin' fer is dat God don' take me befo' I sees Dreamy agin. Whar's Dreamy, Ceely Ann? Why ain't he come yere? Ain't you done sent him word I'se sick like I tole you?

CEELY. I tole dem boys ter tell him speshul, and dey swar dey would soon's dey find him. I s'pose dey ain't kotch him yit. Don' you pester yo'se'f worryin'. Dreamy 'ull come fo' ve'y long.

MAMMY (*after a pause — weakly*). Dere's a feelin' in my haid like I was a-floatin' yander whar I can't see nothin', or 'member nothin', or know de sight er any pusson I knows; en I wants ter see Dreamy agin befo' —

CEELY (*quickly*). Don' waste yo' strenk talkin'. You git a wink er sleep en I wake you when he comes, you heah me?

MAMMY (*faintly*). I does feel mighty drowsy.

(She closes her eyes. Ceely goes over to the window and pulling the curtains aside stands looking down into the street as if she were watching for some one coming. A moment later there is a noise of foot-falls from the stairs in the hall, followed by a sharp rap on the door.)

THE DREAMY KID

CEELY (*turning quickly from the window*). Ssshh!
Ssshh!

(*She hurries to the door, glancing anxiously toward Mammy. The old woman appears to have fallen asleep. Ceely cautiously opens the door a bare inch or so and peeps out. When she sees who it is she immediately tries to slam it shut again, but a vigorous shove from the outside forces her back and Irene pushes her way defiantly into the room. She is a young, good-looking negress, highly rouged and powdered, dressed in gaudy, cheap finery.*)

IRENE (*in a harsh voice — evidently worked up to a great state of nervous excitement*). No you don't, Ceely Ann! I said I was comin' here and it'll take mo'n you to stop me!

CEELY (*almost speechless with horrified indignation — breathing heavily*). Yo' bad 'oman! Git back ter yo' bad-house whar yo' b'longs!

IRENE (*raising her clenched hand — furiously*). Stop dat talkin' to me, nigger, or I'll split yo' fool head! (*As Ceely shrinks away Irene lowers her hand and glances quickly around the room.*) Whar's Dreamy?

CEELY (*scornfully*). Yo' ax me dat! Whar's Dreamy? Ax yo'se'f. Yo's de one ought ter know whar he is.

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IRENE. Den he ain't come here?

CEELY. I ain't tellin' de likes er you wedder he is or not.

IRENE (*pleadingly*). Tell me, Ceely Ann, ain't he been here? He'd be sure to come here 'count of Mammy dyin', dey said.

CEELY (*pointing to Mammy — apprehensively*). Sssshh! (*Then lowering her voice to a whisper — suspiciously*.) Dey said? Who said?

IRENE (*equally suspicious*). None o' your business who said. (*Then pleading again*.) Ceely Ann, I jest got ter see him dis minute, dis secon'! He's in bad, Dreamy is, and I knows somep'n I gotter tell him, somep'n I jest heard —

CEELY (*uncomprehendingly*). In bad? What you jest heah?

IRENE. I ain't tellin' no one but him. (*Desperately*.) For Gawd's sake, tell me whar he is, Ceely!

CEELY. I don' know no mo'n you.

IRENE (*fiercely*). You's lyin', Ceely! You's lyin' ter me jest 'cause I'se bad.

CEELY. De good Lawd bar witness I'se tellin' you de trufe!

IRENE (*hopelessly*). Den I gotter go find him, high and low, somewheres. (*Proudly*.) You ain't got de right not ter trust me, Ceely, where de Dreamy's mixed in it. I'd go ter hell for Dreamy!

THE DREAMY KID

CEELY (*indignantly*). Hush yo' wicked cussin'!
(*Then anxiously.*) Is Dreamy in trouble?

IRENE (*with a scornful laugh*). Trouble? Good Lawd, it's worser'n dat! (*Then in surprise.*) Ain't you heerd what de Dreamy done last night, Ceely?

CEELY (*apprehensively*). What de Dreamy do? Tell me, gal. Somep'n bad?

IRENE (*with the same scornful laugh*). Bad? Worser'n bad, what he done!

CEELY (*lamenting querulously*). Oh good Lawd, I knowed it! I knowed with all his carryin's-on wid dat passel er tough young niggers – him so uppity 'cause he's de boss er de gang – sleepin' all de day 'stead er workin' an' Lawd knows what he does in de nights – fightin' wid white folks, an' totin' a pistol in his pocket – (*with a glance of angry resentment at Irene*) – an' as fo' de udder company he's been keepin' –

IRENE (*fiercely*). Shut your mouth, Ceely! Dat ain't your business.

CEELY. Oh, I knowed Dreamy'd be gittin' in trouble fo' long! De lowflung young trash! An' here's his ole Mammy don' know no diffrunt but he's de mos' innercent young lamb in de worl'. (*In a strained whisper.*) What he do? Is he been stealin' somep'n?

IRENE (*angrily*). You go ter hell, Ceely Ann! You ain't no fren' of de Dreamy's, you talk dat way, and I ain't got no time ter waste argyin' wid

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your fool notions. (*She goes to the door.*) Dreamy'll go ter his death sho's yo' born, if I don't find him an' tell him quick!

CEELY (*terrified*). Oh Lawd!

IRENE (*anxiously*). He'll sho'ly try ter come here and see his ole Mammy befo' she dies, don't you think, Ceely?

CEELY. Fo' Gawd I hopes so! She's been a-prayin' all de day —

IRENE (*opening the door*). You hopes so, you fool nigger! I tells you it's good-bye to de Dreamy, he come here! I knows! I gotter find an' stop him. If he come here, Ceely, you tell him git out quick and hide, he don't wanter git pinched. You hear? You tell him dat, Ceely, for Gawd's sake! I'se got ter go — find him — high an' low.

(*She goes out leaving Ceely staring at her in speechless indignation.*)

CEELY (*drawing a deep breath*). Yo' street gal! I don' b'lieve one word you says — stuffin' me wid yo' bad lies so's you kin keep de Dreamy frum leavin' you! (*Mammy Saunders awakes and groans faintly. Ceely hurries over to her bedside.*) Is de pain hurtin' agin, Mammy?

MAMMY (*vaguely*). Dat you, Dreamy?

CEELY. No, Mammy, dis is Ceely. Dreamy's comin' soon. Is you restin' easy?

MAMMY (*as if she hadn't heard*). Dat you, Dreamy?

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CEELY (*sitting down in the rocker by the bed and taking one of the old woman's hands in hers*). No. Dreamy's comin'.

MAMMY (*after a pause — suddenly*). Does you 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile?

CEELY (*mystified*). My dead Mammy?

MAMMY. Didn' I heah yo' talkin' jest now, Dreamy?

CEELY (*very worried*). I clar ter goodness, she don' know me ary bit. Dis is Ceely Ann talkin' ter yo', Mammy.

MAMMY. Who was yo' talkin' wid, Dreamy?

CEELY (*shaking her head — in a trembling voice*). Hit can't be long befo' de en'. (*In a louder tone*). Hit was me talkin' wid a pusson fum ovah de way. She say tell you Dreamy comin' heah ter see yo' right away. You heah dat, Mammy? (*The old woman sighs but does not answer. There is a pause.*)

MAMMY (*suddenly*). Does yo' 'member yo' dead Mammy, chile? (*Then with a burst of religious exaltation.*) De Lawd have mercy!

CEELY (*like an echo*). Bless de Lawd! (*Then in a frightened half-whisper to herself.*) Po' thing! Her min's done leavin' her jest like de doctor said.

(*She looks down at the old woman helplessly. The door on the right is opened stealthily and the Dreamy Kid slinks in on tiptoe.*)

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CEELY (*hearing a board creak, turns quickly toward the door and gives a frightened start*). Dreamy!

DREAMY (*puts his fingers to his lips — commandingly*). Sssh!

(*He bends down to a crouching position and holding the door about an inch open, peers out into the passage in an attitude of tense waiting, one hand evidently clutching some weapon in the side pocket of his coat. After a moment he is satisfied of not being followed, and, after closing the door carefully and locking it, he stands up and walks to the centre of the room casting a look of awed curiosity at the figure in the bed. He is a well-built, good-looking young negro, light in colour. His eyes are shifty and hard, their expression one of tough, scornful defiance. His mouth is cruel and perpetually drawn back at the corners into a snarl. He is dressed in well-fitting clothes of a flashy pattern. A light cap is pulled down on the side of his head.*)

CEELY (*coming from the bed to meet him*). Bless de Lawd, here you is at las'!

DREAMY (*with a warning gesture*). Nix on de loud talk! Talk low, can't yuh! (*He glances back at the door furtively — then continues with a sneer.*) Yuh're a fine nut, Ceely Ann! What for you send-

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in' out all ober de town for me like you was crazy! D'yuh want ter git me in de cooler? Don' you know dey're after me for what I done last night?

CEELY (*fearfully*). I heerd somep'n – but – what you done, Dreamy?

DREAMY (*with an attempt at a careless bravado*). I croaked a guy, dat's what! A white man.

CEELY (*in a frightened whisper*). What you mean – croaked?

DREAMY (*boastfully*). I shot him dead, dat's what! (*As Ceely shrinks away from him in horror – resentfully.*) Aw say, don' gimme none o' dem looks o' yourn. 'T'warn't my doin' nohow. He was de one lookin' for trouble. I wasn't seekin' for no mess wid him dat I could help. But he told folks he was gwine ter git me for a fac', and dat fo'ced my hand. I had ter git him ter perfect my own life. (*With cruel satisfaction.*) And I got him right, you b'lieve me!

CEELY (*putting her hands over her face with a low moan of terror*). May de good Lawd pardon yo' wickedness! Oh Lawd! What yo' po' ole Mammy gwine say if she hear tell – an' she never knowin' how bad you's got.

DREAMY (*fiercely*). Hell! You ain't tole her, is you?

CEELY. Think I want ter kill her on the instant? An' I didn' know myse'f – what you done – till you tells me. (*Frightenedly.*) Oh, Dreamy, what

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you gwine do now? How you gwine git away?
(*Almost wailing.*) Good Lawd, de perlice don' kotch you suah!

DREAMY (*savagely*). Shut yo' loud mouth, damn you! (*He stands tensely listening for some sound from the hall. After a moment he points to the bed.*) Is Mammy sleepin'?

CEELY (*tiptoes to the bed*). Seems like she is. (*She comes back to him.*) Dat's de way wid her — sleep fo' a few minutes, den she wake, den sleep again.

DREAMY (*scornfully*). Aw, dere ain't nothin' wrong wid her 'ceptin' she's ole. What yuh want send de word tellin' me she's croakin', and git me comin' here at de risk o' my life, and den find her sleepin'. (*Clenching his fist threateningly.*) I gotter mind ter smash yo' face for playin' de damn fool and makin' me de goat. (*He turns toward the door.*) Ain't no us'en me stayin' here when dey'll likely come lookin' for me. I'm gwine out where I gotta chance ter make my git-away. De boys is all fixin' it up for me. (*His hand on the doorknob.*) When Mammy wakes, you tell her I couldn't wait, you hear?

CEELY (*hurrying to him and grabbing his arm — pleadingly*). Don' yo' go now, Dreamy — not jest yit. Fo' de good Lawd's sake, don' you go befo' you speaks wid her! If yo' knew how she's been a-callin' an' a-prayin' for yo' all de day —

DREAMY (*scornfully but a bit uncertainly*). Aw, she don' need none o' me. What good kin I do

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watchin' her do a kip? It'd be dif'frunt if she was croakin' on de level.

CEELY (*in an anguished whisper*). She's gwine wake up in a secon' an' den she call: "Dreamy. Whar's Dreamy?" — an' what I gwine tell her den? An' yo' Mammy is dyin', Dreamy, sho's fate! Her min' been wanderin' an' she don' even recernize me no mo', an' de doctor say when dat come it ain't but a sho't time befo' de en'. Yo' gotter stav wid yo' Mammy long 'nuff ter speak wid her, Dreamy. Yo' jest gotter stay wid her in her las' secon's on dis yearth when she's callin' ter yo'. (*With conviction as he hesitates.*) Listen heah, yo' Dreamy! Yo' don' never git no bit er luck in dis worril ary agin, yo' leaves her now. De perlice gon' kotch yo' suah.

DREAMY (*with superstitious fear*). Ssshh! Can dat bull, Ceely! (*Then boastfully.*) I wasn't pinin' to beat it up here, git me? De boys was all persuadin' me not ter take de chance. It's takin' my life in my hands, dat's what. But when I heerd it was ole Mammy croakin' and axin' ter see me, I says ter myse'f: "Dreamy, you gotter make good wid old Mammy no matter what come — or you don' never git a bit of luck in yo' life no mo'." And I was game and come, wasn't I? Nary body in dis worril kin say de Dreamy ain't game ter de core, n'matter what. (*With sudden decision walks to the foot of the bed and stands looking down at Mammy. A note of fear creeps into his voice.*) Gawd,

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she's quiet 'nuff. Maybe she done passed away in her sleep like de ole ones does. You go see, Ceely; an' if she's on'y sleepin', you wake her up. I wanta speak wid her quick — an' den I'll make a break outa here. You make it fast, Ceely Ann, I tells yo'.

CEELY (*bends down beside the bed*). Mammy! Mammy! Here's de Dreamy.

MAMMY (*opens her eyes — drowsily and vaguely, in a weak voice*). Dreamy?

DREAMY (*shuffling his feet and moving around the bed*). Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY (*fastening her eyes on him with fascinated joy*). Dreamy! Hit's yo'! (*Then uncertainly*.) I ain't dreamin' nor seein' ha'nts, is I?

DREAMY (*coming forward and taking her hand*). 'Deed I ain't no ghost. Here I is, sho' 'nuff.

MAMMY (*clutching his hand tight and pulling it down on her breast — in an ecstasy of happiness*). Didn' I know you'd come! Didn' I say: "Dreamy ain't gwine let his ole Mammy die all lone by he'se'f an' him not dere wid her." I knows yo'd come. (*She starts to laugh joyously, but coughs and sinks back weakly*.)

DREAMY (*shudders in spite of himself as he realizes for the first time how far gone the old woman is — forcing a tone of joking reassurance*). What's dat foolishness I hears you talkin', Mammy? Wha' d' yuh mean pullin' dat bull 'bout croakin' on me? Shoo!

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Tryin' ter kid me, ain't you? Shoo! You live ter plant de flowers on my grave, see if you don'.

MAMMY (*sadly and very weakly*). I knows! I knows! Hit ain't long now. (*Bursting into a sudden weak hysteria.*) Yo' stay heah, Dreamy! Yo' stay heah by me, yo' stay heah – till de good Lawd takes me home. Yo' promise me dat! Yo' do dat fo' po' ole Mammy, won't yo'?

DREAMY (*uneasily*). 'Deed I will, Mammy, 'deed I will.

MAMMY (*closing her eyes with a sigh of relief – calmly*). Bless de Lawd for dat. Den I ain't skeered no mo'. (*She settles herself comfortably in the bed as if preparing for sleep.*)

CEELY (*in a low voice*). I gotter go home fo' a minute, Dreamy. I ain't been dere all de day and Lawd knows what happen. I'll be back yere befo' ve'y long.

DREAMY (*his eyes fixed on Mammy*). Aw right, beat it if yuh wanten. (*Turning to her – in a fierce whisper.*) On'y don' be long. I can't stay here an' take dis risk, you hear?

CEELY (*frightenedly*). I knows, chile. I come back, I swar!

(*She goes out quietly. Dreamy goes quickly to the window and cautiously searches the street below with his eyes.*)

MAMMY (*uneasily*). Dreamy. (*He hurries back*

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and takes her hand again.) I got de mos' 'culiar feelin' in my head. Seems like de years done all roll away an' I'm back down home in de ole place whar you was bo'n. (*After a short pause.*) Does yo' 'member yo' own mammy, chile?

DREAMY. No.

MAMMY. Yo' was too young, I s'pec'. Yo' was on'y a baby w'en she tuck 'n' die. My Sal was a mighty fine 'oman, if I does say hit m'se'f.

DREAMY (*fidgeting nervously*). Don' you talk, Mammy. Better you'd close yo' eyes an' rest.

MAMMY (*with a trembling smile — weakly*). Shoo! W'at is I done come ter wid my own gran' chile bossin' me 'bout. I wants ter talk. You knows you ain't give me much chance ter talk wid yo' dese las' years.

DREAMY (*sullenly*). I ain't had de time, Mammy; but you knows I was always game ter give you anything I got. (*A note of appeal in his voice.*) You knows dat, don' you, Mammy?

MAMMY. Sho'ly I does. Yo' been a good boy, Dreamy; an' if dere's one thing more'n 'nother makes me feel like I mighter done good in de sight er de Lawd, hits dat I raised yo' fum a baby.

DREAMY (*clearing his throat gruffly*). Don' you talk so much, Mammy.

MAMMY (*querulously*). I gotter talk, chile. Come times — w'en I git thinkin' yere in de bed — w'at's

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gwine ter come ter me a'mos' b'fore I knows hit — like de thief in de night — en den I gits skeered. But w'en I talks wid yo' I ain't skeered a bit.

DREAMY (*defiantly*). You ain't got nothin' to be skeered of — not when de Dreamy's here.

MAMMY (*after a slight pause — faintly*). Dere's a singin' in my ears all de time. (*Seized by a sudden religious ecstasy.*) Maybe hit's de singin' hymns of de blessed angels I done heah fum above. (*Wildly.*) Bless Gawd! Bless Gawd! Pity dis po' ole sinner.

DREAMY (*with an uneasy glance at the door*). Sssh, Mammy! Don' shout so loud.

MAMMY. De pictures keep a whizzin' fo' my eyes like de thread in a sewing machine. Seem 's if all my life done fly back ter me all ter once. (*With a flickering smile — weakly.*) Does you know how yo' come by dat nickname dey alls call yo' — de Dreamy? Is I ever tole yo' dat?

DREAMY (*evidently lying*). No, Mammy.

MAMMY. Hit was one mawnin' b'fo' we come No'th. Me an' yo' mammy — yo' was des a baby in arms den —

DREAMY (*hears a noise from the hall*). Sssh, Mammy! For God's sake, don't speak for a minute. I hears somep'n. (*He stares at the door, his face hardening savagely, and listens intently.*)

MAMMY (*in a frightened tone*). W'at's de matter, chile?

DREAMY. Sssh! Somebody comin'. (*A noise of*

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footsteps comes from the hall staircase. Dreamy springs to his feet.) Leggo my hand, Mammy — jest for a secon'. I come right back to you.

(He pulls his hand from the old woman's grip. She falls back on the pillows moaning. Dreamy pulls a large automatic revolver from his coat pocket and tiptoes quickly to the door. As he does so there is a sharp rap. He stands listening at the crack for a moment, then noiselessly turns the key, unlocking the door. Then he crouches low down by the wall so that the door, when opened, will hide him from the sight of anyone entering. There is another and louder rap on the door.)

MAMMY *(groaning)*. W'at's dat, Dreamy? Whar is yo'?

DREAMY. Ssshh! *(Then muffling his voice he calls.)* Come in.

(He raises the revolver in his hand. The door is pushed open and Irene enters, her eyes peering wildly about the room. Her bosom is heaving as if she had been running and she is trembling all over with terrified excitement.)

IRENE *(not seeing him calls out questioningly)*. Dreamy?

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DREAMY (*lowering his revolver and rising to his feet roughly*). Close dat door!

IRENE (*whirling about with a startled cry*). Dreamy!

DREAMY (*shutting the door and locking it — aggressively*). Shut yo' big mouth, gal, or I'll bang it shut for you! You wanta let de whole block know where I is?

IRENE (*hysterical with joy — trying to put her arms around him*). Bless God, I foun' you at last!

DREAMY (*pushing her away roughly*). Leggo o' me! Why you come here follerin' me? Ain't yo' got 'nuff sense in yo' fool head ter know de bulls is liable ter shadow you when dey knows you's my gal? Is you pinin' ter git me kotched an' sent to de chair?

IRENE (*terrified*). No, no!

DREAMY (*savagely*). I gotter mind ter hand you one you won't ferget! (*He draws back his fist.*)

IRENE (*shrinking away*). Don' you hit me, Dreamy! Don' you beat me up now! Jest lemme 'xplain, dat's all.

MAMMY (*in a frightened whimper*). Dreamy! Come yere to me. Whar is yo'? I'se skeered!

DREAMY (*in a fierce whisper to Irene*). Can dat bull or I'll fix you. (*He hurries to the old woman and pats her hand.*) Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY. Who dat yo's a-talkin' wid?

DREAMY. On'y a fren' o' Ceely Ann's, Mammy,

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askin' where she is. I gotter talk wid her some mo' yit. You sleep, Mammy. (*He goes to Irene.*)

MAMMY (*feebly*). Don' yo' leave me, Dreamy.

DREAMY. I'se right here wid you. (*Fiercely, to Irene.*) You git the hell outa here, you Reeny, you heah – quick! Dis ain't no place for de likes o' you wid ole Mammy dyin'.

IRENE (*with a horrified glance at the bed*). Is she dyin' – honest?

DREAMY. Ssshh! She's croakin', I tells yo' – an' I gotter stay wid her fo' a while – an' I ain't got no time ter be pesterin' wid you. Beat it, now! Beat it outa here befo' I knocks yo' cold, git me?

IRENE. Jest wait a secon' for de love o' Gawd. I got somep'n ter tell you –

DREAMY. I don' wantar hear yo' fool talk. (*He gives her a push toward the door.*) Git outa dis, you hear me?

IRENE. I'll go. I'm going soon – soon's ever I've had my say. Lissen, Dreamy! It's about de coppers I come ter tell you.

DREAMY (*quickly*). Why don' you say dat befo'? What you know, gal?

IRENE. Just befo' I come here to find you de first time, de Madam sends me out to Murphy's ter git her a bottle o' gin. I goes in de side door but I ain't rung de bell yet. I hear yo' name spoken an' I stops ter lissen. Dey was three or four men in de back room. Dey don't hear me

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open de outside door, an' dey can't see me, 'course. It was Big Sullivan from de Central Office talkin'. He was talkin' 'bout de killin' you done last night and he tells dem odders he's heerd 'bout de ole woman gittin' so sick, and dat if dey don't fin' you none of de udder places dey's lookin', dey's goin' wait for you here. Dey s'pecs you come here say good-bye to Mammy befo' you make yo' git-away.

DREAMY. It's aw right den. Dey ain't come yit. Twister Smith done tole me de coast was clear befo' I come here.

IRENE. Dat was den. It ain't now.

DREAMY (*excitedly*). What you mean, gal?

IRENE. I was comin' in by de front way when I sees some pusson hidin' in de doorway 'cross de street. I gits a good peek at him and when I does — it's a copper, Dreamy, suah's yo' born, in his plain clo'se, and he's a watchin' de door o' dis house like a cat.

DREAMY (*goes to the window and stealthily crouching by the dark side peeps out. One glance is enough. He comes quickly back to Irene*). You got de right dope, gal. It's dat Mickey. I knows him even in de dark. Dey're waitin' — so dey ain't wise I'm here yit, dat's suah.

IRENE. But dey'll git wise befo' long.

DREAMY. He don' pipe you comin' in here?

IRENE. I skulked roun' and sneaked in by de

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back way froo de yard. Dey ain't none o' dem dar yit. (*Raising her voice – excitedly.*) But dere will be soon. Dey're boun' to git wise to dat back door. You ain't got no time to lose, Dreamy. Come on wid me now. Git back where yo' safe. It's de cooler for you certain if you stays here. Dey'll git you like a rat in de trap. (*As Dreamy hesitates.*) For de love of Gawd, Dreamy, wake up to youse'f!

DREAMY (*uncertainly*). I can't beat it – wid Mammy here alone. My luck done turn bad all my life, if I does.

IRENE (*fiercely*). What good's you gittin' pinched and sent to de chair gwine do her? Is you crazy mad? Come away wid me, I tells you!

DREAMY (*half-persuaded – hesitatingly*). I gotter speak wid her. You wait a secon'.

IRENE (*wringing her hands*). Dis ain't no time now for fussin' wid her.

DREAMY (*gruffly*). Shut up! (*He makes a motion for her to remain where she is and goes over to the bed – in a low voice.*) Mammy.

MAMMY (*hazily*). Dat you, Dreamy? (*She tries to reach out her hand and touch him.*)

DREAMY. I'm gwine leave you – jest for a moment, Mammy. I'll send de word for Ceely Ann –

MAMMY (*wideawake in an instant – with intense alarm*). Don' yo' do dat! Don' yo' move one step out er yere or yo'll be sorry, Dreamy.

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DREAMY (*apprehensively*). I gotter go, I tells you. I'll come back.

MAMMY (*with wild grief*). O good Lawd! W'en I's drawin' de las' bre'fs in dis po' ole body — (*Frenziedly*.) De Lawd have mercy! Good Lawd have mercy!

DREAMY (*fearfully*). Stop dat racket, Mammy! You bring all o' dem down on my head! (*He rushes over and crouches by the window again to peer out — in relieved tones.*) He ain't heerd nothin'. He's dar you yit.

IRENE (*imploringly*). Come on, Dreamy! (*Mammy groans with pain.*)

DREAMY (*hurrying to the bed*). What's de matter, Mammy?

IRENE (*stamping her foot*). Dreamy! Fo' Gawd's sake!

MAMMY. Lawd have mercy! (*She groans.*) Gimme yo' han', chile. Yo' ain't gwine leave me now, Dreamy? Yo' ain't, is yo'? Yo' ole Mammy won't bodder yo' long. Yo' know w'at yo' promise me, Dreamy! Yo' promise yo' sacred word yo' stay wid me till de en'. (*With an air of sombre prophecy — slowly.*) If yo' leave me now, yo' ain't gwine git no bit er luck s'long's yo' live, I tells yo' dat!

DREAMY (*frightened — pleadingly*). Don' you say dat, Mammy!

IRENE. Come on, Dreamy!

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DREAMY (*slowly*). I can't. (*In awed tones.*) Don' you hear de curse she puts on me if I does?

MAMMY (*her voice trembling with weak tears*). Don' go, chile!

DREAMY (*hastily*). I won't leave dis room, I swar ter you! (*Relieved by the finality in his tones, the old woman sighs and closes her eyes. Dreamy frees his hand from hers and goes to Irene. He speaks with a strange calm.*) De game's up, gal. You better beat it while de goin's good.

IRENE (*aghast*). You gwine stay?

DREAMY. I gotter, gal. I ain't gwine agin her dyin' curse. No, suh!

IRENE (*pitifully*). But dey'll git you suah!

DREAMY (*slapping the gun in his pocket significantly*). Dey'll have some gittin'. I git some o' dem fust. (*With gloomy determination.*) Dey don't git dis chicken alive! Lawd Jesus, no suh. Not de Dreamy!

IRENE (*helplessly*). Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy! (*She goes to the window — with a short cry.*) He's talkin' wid some one. Dere's two o' dem. (*Dreamy hurries to her side.*)

DREAMY. I knows him — de udder. It's Big Sullivan. (*Pulling her away roughly.*) Come out o' dat! Dey'll see you. (*He pushes her toward the door.*) Dey won't wait down dere much longer. Dey'll be comin' up here soon. (*Prayerfully, with*

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a glance at the bed.) I hopes she's croaked by den', fo' Christ I does!

IRENE (*as if she couldn't believe it*). Den you ain't gwine save youse'f while dere's time? (*Pleadingly*). Oh, Dreamy, you can make it yit!

DREAMY. De game's up, I tole you. (*With gloomy fatalism*.) I s'pect it hatter be. Yes, suh. Dey'd git me in de long run anyway – and wid her curse de luck'd be agin me. (*With sudden anger*.) Git outa here, you Reeny! You ain't aimin' ter get shot up too, is you? Ain't no sense in dat.

IRENE (*fiercely*). I'se stayin' too, here wid you!

DREAMY. No you isn't! None o' dat bull! You ain't got no mix in dis jamb.

IRENE. Yes, I is! Ain't you my man?

DREAMY. Don' make no dif. I don't wanta git you in Dutch more'n you is. It's bad 'nuff fo' me. (*He pushes her toward the door*.) Blow while you kin, I tells you!

IRENE (*resisting him*). No, Dreamy! What I care if dey kills me? I'se gwine stick wid you.

DREAMY (*gives her another push*). No, you isn't, gal. (*Unlocking the door – relentlessly*.) Out wid you!

IRENE (*hysterically*). You can't turn me out. I'm gwine stay.

DREAMY (*gloomily*). On'y one thing fo' me ter do den. (*He hits her on the side of the face with all his might, knocking her back against the wall where*

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she sways as if about to fall. Then he opens the door and grabs her two arms from behind.) Out wid you, gal!

IRENE (*moaning*). Dreamy! Dreamy! Lemme stay wid you! (*He pushes her into the passage and holds her there at arm's length.*) Fo' Gawd's sake, Dreamy!

MAMMY (*whimperingly*). Dreamy! I'se skeered!

IRENE (*from the hall*). I'se gwine stay right here at de door. You might s'well lemme in.

DREAMY (*frowning*). Don' do dat, Reeny. (*Then with a sudden idea.*) You run roun' and tell de gang what's up. Maybe dey git me outa dis, you hear?

IRENE (*with eager hope*). You think dey kin?

DREAMY. Never kin tell. You hurry – through de back yard, 'member – an' don' git pinched, now.

IRENE (*eagerly*). I'm gwine! I'll bring dem back!

DREAMY (*stands listening to her retreating footsteps – then shuts and locks the door – gloomily to himself*). Ain't no good. Dey dassent do nothin' – but I hatter git her outa dis somehow.

MAMMY (*groaning*). Dreamy!

DREAMY. Here I is. Jest a secon'. (*He goes to the window.*)

MAMMY (*weakly*). I feels – like – de en's comin'. Oh, Lawd, Lawd!

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DREAMY (*absent-mindedly*). Yes, Mammy.
(*Aloud to himself.*) Dey're sneakin' cross de street.
Dere's anudder of 'em. Dat's tree.

(*He glances around the room quickly — then hurries over and takes hold of the chest of drawers. As he does so the old woman commences to croon shrilly to herself.*)

DREAMY. Stop dat noise, Mammy! Stop dat noise!

MAMMY (*wanderingly*). Dat's how come yo' got dat — dat nickname — Dreamy.

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy.

(*He puts the lamp on the floor to the rear of the door, turning it down low. Then he carries the chest of drawers over and places it against the door as a barricade.*)

MAMMY (*rambling as he does this — very feebly*). Does yo' know — I gives you dat name — w'en yo's des a baby — lyin' in my arms —

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy.

MAMMY. Down by de crik — under de ole willow — whar I uster take yo' — wid yo' big eyes a-chasin' — de sun flitterin' froo de grass — an' out on de water —

DREAMY (*takes the revolver from his pocket and puts it on top of the chest of drawers*). Dey don' git

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de Dreamy alive – not for de chair! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY. An' yo' was always – a-lookin' – an' a-thinkin' ter yo'se'f – an' yo' big eyes jest a-dreamin' an' a-dreamin' – an' dat's w'en I gives yo' dat nickname – Dreamy – Dreamy –

DREAMY. Yes, Mammy. (*He listens at the crack of the door – in a tense whisper.*) I don' hear dem – but dey're comin' sneakin' up de stairs, I knows it.

MAMMY (*faintly*). Whar is yo', Dreamy? I can't – ha'dly – breathe – no mo'. Oh, Lawd have mercy!

DREAMY (*goes over to the bed*). Here I is, Mammy.

MAMMY (*speaking with difficulty*). Yo' – kneel down – chile – say a pray'r – Oh, Lawd!

DREAMY. Jest a secon', Mammy. (*He goes over and gets his revolver and comes back.*)

MAMMY. Gimme – yo' hand – chile. (*Dreamy gives her his left hand. The revolver is in his right. He stares nervously at the door.*) An' yo' kneel down – pray fo' me. (*Dreamy gets on one knee beside the bed. There is a sound from the passage as if some one had made a misstep on the stairs – then silence. Dreamy starts and half aims his gun in the direction of the door. Mammy groans weakly.*) I'm dyin', chile. Hit's de en'. You pray for me – out loud – so's I can heah. Oh, Lawd! (*She gasps to catch her breath.*)

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DREAMY (*abstractedly, not having heard a word she has said*). Yes, Mammy. (*Aloud to himself with an air of grim determination as if he were making a pledge.*) Dey don't git de Dreamy! Not while he's 'live! Lawd Jesus, no suh!

MAMMY (*falteringly*). Dat's right — yo' pray — Lawd Jesus — Lawd Jesus — (*There is another slight sound of movement from the hallway.*)

(*The Curtain Falls*)